

# HELEN GRANT, TEACHER



AMANDA M. DOUGLAS





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HELEN GRANT, TEACHER













HELEN GRANT FLOURISHED A LETTER IN THE SUNSHINE.— *Page 1.*



The Helen Grant Books

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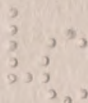
# HELEN GRANT, TEACHER

BY

AMANDA M. DOUGLAS

Author of "Helen Grant, Graduate," "Helen Grant,  
Senior," "Helen Grant in College," "Helen  
Grant's Schooldays," "In the King's  
Country," "In Trust," "Larry,"  
"The Kathie Stories," "Almost  
as Good as a Boy," etc.

*ILLUSTRATED BY AMY BROOKS*



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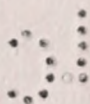
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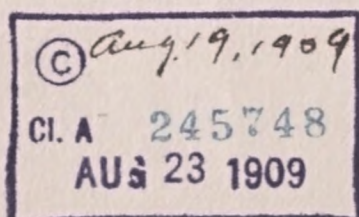
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HELEN GRANT, TEACHER



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# Helen Grant, Teacher

## CHAPTER I

### AMONG THE BEGINNINGS

“THAT great minds run in the same channels is most true. It is an axiom whose beginning is doubtless lost in obscurity. It is useful in the present instance to adorn my explanation and perhaps prove the truth of another—that all things come to him or her who waits.”

Helen Grant flourished a letter in the sunshine that made waves of light and shade, while a smile of amusement irradiated her face.

Miss Craven had come out on the porch, with the baby on one arm and a number of letters in the other hand. She slipped into the



hammock and put the child down beside her, and with a gayety in both voice and face exclaimed:

“Please specify the great minds and the cause of this jubilation.”

“Yours for one. Don’t you remember you suggested we should go to Westfield incognita, like royalty, and spy out the land and the buildings thereof? And there may be a tower on the new school. As for bulwarks——”

“You ridiculous girl! Are you casting up my foolish plan to my mortification, or what has dawned upon your mind? You haven’t been gently relinquished?”

Helen did laugh then, a rippling sound that floated off on the summer air.

“That would have been an awful blow to my self-esteem and my numerous attainments. Here is a pleasant, friendly, dignified letter from Mr. Hildreth. Mr. Underwood, the principal, is to be in town next week with his wife, and Mr. Hildreth thinks it would be a good thing for me to meet him—him more particularly, I suppose, before I begin my labors. In a certain way I shall be under his super-



vision. So Mr. Hildreth invites me and any friend I would like to have accompany me, some day next week after Monday, the day being left to my convenience. I might like to see the pretty town and the school buildings, and he would be pleased to entertain us. So you see we can go boldly without a misgiving. I am to write and appoint the day and the train, and he has sent a local time-table. How fortunate we were going to New York next week instead of mountain wilds."

"Why, that is really delightful! Yes, I shall like to go. I want to get you placed in my mind so I can look at you with the eye of faith. And I am curious to see this Mr. Hildreth. He must be a superior kind of man. And you will not be so far from the city but that you can often come and we can enjoy some delights together. I was afraid you would go out West or somewhere. And if I cannot have you all to myself, this is next best to it."

"How much you love me, Juliet," and Helen's eyes had a soft, misty look. "I sometimes wonder why people like me so well.



But it is very delightful, all the same. You do not regard every one with similar feelings because they have not the same qualities. I think I am formed for friendship in an eminent degree."

"And you are never jealous or exclusive. There are many lovely people in the world when you come to know them well, and no one has quite all the virtues and graces. And I have a feeling that you will be happy at Westfield."

"Yes, I have an inward premonition that it will be at least satisfactory. I have a desire to try my own strength and knowledge, and the training of the past four years, to see if there really is enough backbone to me to stand upright in the new surroundings."

She did not look as if she lacked either physical or mental fiber.

"We thought we would go to the city on Tuesday. Then I will appoint Wednesday. And we are to give a day or two to our young married couple who are in the throes of selecting a home and no doubt need much good advice. I am very anxious to see Shirley, for



that matter, Willard as well, though they seem very like children to me."

Juliet laughed as she raised her eyes to Helen.

"Don't allow yourself to grow old too fast, or to outgrow your contemporaries," she said. "Youth is too charming to be thrust aside for any fancied wisdom."

"Oh, I'm not longing for old age, nor even middle life. I mean to have a good long youth, and we shall share it together. Now you may read your letters and I will answer mine."

Helen read hers over again and admired the tone of it, the cordiality that was not effusiveness.

Yes, it would be quite a new experience. Hitherto she had been cast almost exclusively with girls and women. She recalled the fact that she had not liked Professor Blake at first—most of the girls had been afraid of his sharp glance that seemed to hold so much in reserve, and his sarcasms. Perhaps young girls *did* appear weak and puerile to learned men, and she recalled her father's opinion of



them. But they were to be the women of the future, wives and mothers doubtless, and they needed sympathy when they did not see the way clearly.

There had been animated discussions on co-education. This would be one aspect of it. Boys, at what was supposed to be the most troublesome period of their lives. If only they liked to study! If they were intent upon acquiring an education! She had roused more than one girl to an appreciation of her opportunities, but there was a difference between a friend and a teacher.

"But I shall not worry about it now," she said to herself. "I'm not going to plan how I shall cross the stream until I get to it. There will be a bridge or a boat most likely, and some one to hold out a helping hand. There always has been."

She answered her important note first. There were several others. Now and then she paused to listen to the sweet voices and the merry baby laughter that floated up from the porch. What a lovely girlhood these Gartney children would have with Miss Craven. The



many things she had missed in her own life were to bud and blossom in theirs. True she had not known them, but there had been the hunger and deprivation she did not understand clearly enough to put into words. She was enjoying the life as well as the children, making good use of the fortune that had come to her, bringing forth fruit abundantly.

Helen joined them on the porch as she slipped her letters in the box.

“Isn’t baby just lovely!” cried Elma, her face flushed with delight and her eyes lustrous with affection. “I was just a tiny bit afraid when she first came, for you see she could be all Aunt Juliet’s and we are only part. There was papa, you know, and when he talked about our own dear mamma it seemed as if she came into the room, and we could feel that she was there though we could not see her. And there is the guardian, and the school, and Mrs. Aldred, and for a long while the baby will not have any one but Aunt Juliet and grandma. But I think she can never love her any better than we do. Isn’t it curious that you can love



so many people and not have the love used up?"

The little girl glanced with wondering eyes to the bright ones above her.

"Because there is so much love in your own generous heart," replied Helen. "It is one of the things that doesn't make you any poorer for giving it away, and if you hoarded it up you wouldn't be any richer."

"That's queer, too," with a puzzled look.

Helen smiled with a tender gravity. She thought of the old schooldays, and Daisy Bell, who longed to center every affection upon herself. Poor sweet Daisy! To be laid in the cold dark earth when the world was so beautiful. Had she ever enjoyed it quite so much? It was a gladsome and lovely thing just to live in it.

The days were full of pleasure. There was a charm about the house that lured people thither. The little girls had a lawn party, but mothers and elder sisters begged to come and look on.

"O dear! Why do you go away?" and



Wilma hung about Helen. "Will you surely be back on Saturday?"

"Surely, surely. And you must take good care of baby."

Willard Bell met the travelers at the station. He seemed to have come up to a completer stature of manhood since his marriage and delight shone in his eyes.

"I came for you because we dropped on something so delightful on Saturday and concluded to give you a surprise. A pretty furnished apartment, where the tenant wanted to remain away until the middle of October; one of the stenographers for the firm. That will give us plenty of time to look around and get furnished. We went in yesterday and are really housekeeping. It is simply great. Mother comes down this afternoon and will stay a while. So you are not going to any hotel."

"Are you sure guests will not be a bother?" interposed Juliet smilingly.

"Oh, Shirley was wild over the plan. She's grown prettier than ever. You knew, I suppose, that her parents went abroad,



so she hasn't any one to depend on but me."

The dependence was certainly bringing out a very attractive manliness.

"We're up near the Park and we have green fields at our very elbows. It's convenient, too. I begged off these two days though I've had grand vacations, and now must let the others take their chance. Here," stopping the trolley, "it's just a bit of a walk."

They saw a handsome row of houses joined together, in appearance like a hotel. Willard guided them up one flight, but before they reached the top Shirley flew out with a joyous exclamation.

She appeared oddly changed as well, not any older or more sedate, but with an air of experience that sat charmingly upon her.

"Why, it seems an age to me since commencement. I've been just brimming over with happiness, and O dear, there's a book full of experiences and delights, but I've wanted you all the same! Willard said I almost made him jealous, I loved you so."

Helen smiled and kissed the sweet face.



Yes, the little labor had brought a great reward.

The rooms were certainly very pretty and not too ornately furnished. With their hats laid aside Shirley drew Helen down on the sofa.

"We were up to see mother on Sunday and she said you had taken a position in some pretty town not far from New York. I am so glad! We shall be able to see you quite often. Have you kept in touch with many of the girls? I suppose there will be a new crowd when college opens. Oh, it was real splendid, wasn't it? I'm sure I ought to be glad, for it gave me the happiness of my life. Oh, Helen, are you quite sure you will never regret——"

"You foolish child! What should I regret?"

"Giving up Willard."

"Hush, Shirley. Don't ever think of that," and Helen kissed her tenderly. "Can't you see now that you are the very one for him, that you suit him, that you make him happy with the sort of love I never could have



given him? We can be splendid friends. I don't know that I should feel so well satisfied if it had been any other girl. And you must never have a misgiving about all the joy that can be put into both lives."

"You are such a grand sort of a girl, Helen. Oh, I want some one just magnificent to fall in love with you some day."

Helen laughed. Willard had been showing Juliet about with the pride of a householder. Then he said to Helen, "You see it is so long since I have had a real home. That was given up when father died. Dear father! I often think now how much his heart was in it and how happy he made us children. I shall take him for my ideal, my pattern. He seems so near to me, and to mother as well. We always have a good talk about him when we meet. And I think he would have loved Shirley, though his heart was set upon you," and Willard flushed a little. "You should have been born in our household, though then you couldn't have been Helen Grant," with a rather amused intonation.

"No, I might have been very different."



"And I like you just as you are. I'm so glad we can see a little of each other, and I do wonder how you will like the school."

"It will be quite a new experience, of course. I am interested in trying my strength, finding out whether I have really learned anything worth while for others and for the world. For we all have a duty toward it and the people in it."

"You are always taking in the outside people," half-admiringly, half-jealously.

"I find so many delightful ones," she returned.

Then Willard went for his mother, and Shirley wanted to hear about the girls. Leslie was to keep her position another year, Lorraine was to stay at home and try society.

"And that girl who gave up the prize?"

"Oh, she is going through and will be an honor girl, I know, Miss Powers. And she is one of the girls who is not the least bit arrogant because her father is a rich man. She is a wholesome, happy-hearted girl, and will make others happy as well."

"How many girls you come to know! And



you can't be real friends with them all. Then they *do* drop out of themselves. I answered a lot of congratulatory letters from girls who thought they loved me a great deal, and only a few of them seemed to care about keeping up a correspondence. But you wouldn't want to with so many."

"No, indeed! We have to weed them out, or they weed us out," with a comprehensive smile.

They were very glad to see Mrs. Bell again. Shirley made a dainty housemistress and the supper was most enjoyable. The husband and wife would not listen to any separation for the night, indeed Mrs. Bell declared she must have a visit with Helen, and was delighted to hear that she would be at no great distance.

"And Willard insists that I shall spend the winter with them when they are settled in their own house. I am so glad to keep my son's love, and I think Shirley will make him very happy," said the mother.

"They will be happy because they truly love each other so well. And Shirley is not a silly, sentimental girl if she is enthusiastic. She



has a fine strength that will increase with the using."

But Helen knew she would always be very dear to the mother's heart.

The two guests took their train the next morning and found, after leaving the ferry behind, that the road was through a pleasant section of the country, with a number of small thriving towns, and one of considerable note on the way. There was a pretty river running in and out, fed by some smaller stream. And presently the conductor called out their station.

Mr. Hildreth stood on the platform, so tall and erect that one could easily distinguish him, even if he had not lifted his hat at the first moment.

"I hope you had a comfortable journey. I am very glad to greet you," he exclaimed.

Helen introduced her friend, who was cordially welcomed.

"It is a fine morning and we have some time on our hands, so I propose to drive you about a little. We think our town very pretty, though we do not ape the grandeur of the



larger cities. Indeed we are quite rural, even if we are more than two hundred years old."

He assisted them into the surrey. "What a splendid team!" exclaimed Helen. "And such a perfect match!"

He looked pleased, and seated himself a little sidewise so that he could talk to them without much effort. He had not over-estimated her.

Below the station there were some factories and a paper mill, interspersed with cottages. The fine residential part lay above with a gentle ascent for several streets, then a level stretching off to some rather sharply rising ground making a long reach of woodland. Even now the older people said—"Upon the mountain." There were several wide handsome streets with beautiful grounds and spacious old-time houses. They crossed two that were devoted to stores and business offices. A fine clubroom with well-kept surroundings and a field for athletic sports, two very quaint churches, and some more modern ones. Then Mr. Hildreth turned a little farther south.



"Here is our school, though there is a smaller one over to the west. This has had several additions beside the corner, which is the high school." It really was an imposing building. The corner was of three stories surmounted by a tower, and though plain was not stiff.

"This will be your temple of learning," smiling over to Helen. "If you find us unduly proud you must excuse our provincialism, and please do not dwarf it by comparison with your college. It has been quite a struggle to get it, and having achieved it, we exact admiration from all newcomers."

"It is very handsome, certainly. And it was a large school before."

"Yes. The lower end is a kindergarten and primary. Then the Roman Catholics have a large parochial school connected with their church, which takes in many of the mill households. We have been a rather old-fashioned, perhaps unprogressive, town until of late years, satisfied to let the world rush madly on so long as it did not disturb us. Still we have a very nice free library, our



churches are well sustained, and the clubhouse has a fine auditorium where there are lectures, concerts, sometimes a play, and altogether we do not stagnate."

"I should think not," Helen replied, with a sense of amusement at his tone and the gleam of humor in his eyes. "And it is a beautiful town."

"We will inspect the interiors after luncheon, when you may be better fortified."

They turned into one of the old streets, bordered with wide-branching maples, the houses standing back a short distance with well-kept lawns in front and ornamented with beds of choice flowers. One on the corner was rather picturesque, with an added wing surmounted by a tower large enough for an observatory. Mr. Hildreth turned into a driveway and paused at the broad porch, handing out his two guests. A tidy middle-aged woman opened the door.

The addition had set the hall in the middle, which was spacious enough for a room, finished in oak with a broad Eastlake staircase. On one side was a sitting-room with the din-



ing-room back of it, on the other the library and a sort of music-room. There were some fine pictures, two or three elegant vases, but it was a man's room, with no small feminine adornments.

"Mrs. Ruden," he said, "will you take the ladies upstairs and see that they have whatever will render them comfortable?"

She motioned to them to follow her. The chamber was rich in old-time belongings, the china appointments being remarkably beautiful, the mahogany furniture polished and carved to a degree.

"Really, it is very grand," began Helen when Mrs. Ruden had left them. "But I'd like to explore the library downstairs. And all this for one man. Why, he should have sons and daughters to enjoy this great house."

"Has he never been married?" asked Juliet.

Helen lapsed into thought. "It seemed to me Professor Yarrow suggested there had been an unfortunate marriage in early life, but I was not really paying attention."

There was a lively greeting in the hall



presently—a woman's rather merry voice, and a man's stronger one. The girls began to smooth their ruffled hair and hasten their adorning.

"I suppose that is my future—it will not do to call him compeer, nor preceptor, but I do suppose he will be the head of all things; the great Mogul."

"Oh, I hope you will like him, Helen——"

"I know my way about," and a light step with the rustle of silken garments mounted the stairs. Helen came to the doorway.

A bright fresh-faced woman of five-and-thirty perhaps, with an abundance of fuzzy light hair which the wind had blown about, blue eyes that just now looked curious yet pleasant, a mouth that still dimpled at the corners, a rather youthful figure in a light summer frock frilled and adorned with lace, paused and glanced at them with a smile.

"May I have the pleasure of guessing? I think this is Miss Grant," looking squarely at Juliet.

Both girls laughed.

"A blunder the first thing! And I prided



myself on my penetration. But you look so young and girlish, Miss Grant, and I think we are apt to settle upon an idea of how a person should be," flushing a little at her mistake.

"This is my friend, Miss Craven, who has adopted me into sisterhood," explained Helen in a bright tone. "I am very glad to meet you," she continued.

"I hope you will like us and the place, though I dare say it will seem lonesome at first after being with such a host of girls. I was two years at a boarding school and liked it very much. But it seems long ago. I have been married fifteen years. And we have spent seven of them here, so I may be considered quite an old resident. But you would hardly believe how the place has changed, improved I ought to own candidly. It wore quite a country aspect then. But I suppose your college was not in the midst of a city."

"Oh, no. In fact there were only little towns around, so that we should not be plunged into temptation, I suppose," with an arch smile.

"Mr. Hildreth was very enthusiastic about



it. And a friend he had there who married a college president somewhere at the west, and whose home-making charmed him. I suppose you know her?"

"Oh, yes. She is a most delightful person."

"I shouldn't think it would be much fun to come down to simple every-day living, getting meals and fussing about a house, and looking after a husband, who I dare say is always forgetting where he put things. I suppose she was not very young and no doubt glad to give up her honors."

"She was thirty-five and looked young for that. I think she was very much in love," Helen returned rather triumphantly.

Mrs. Underwood laughed gayly. "It always seems as if youth and love should be compeers. And when a man has won a standing place for himself he is proud to go on. But a woman doesn't appear so eager for a career after all."

"Laura, are you going to keep Miss Grant upstairs for the next hour?" inquired a voice down in the hall.



"Oh, good gracious! That's the man of it when he considers that he has the right to order your comings and goings. So let us march down. I'm quite at home in this house, and I think it just grand," and Mrs. Underwood led the way.



## CHAPTER II

### A LUNCHEON

MR. HILDRETH stood at the foot of the stairs and made the introductions. Then he escorted the two strangers into the dining-room, and seated Helen on his right hand as the guest of honor, asking Mrs. Underwood to take the head of the table, to pour the tea when it came in.

The appointments of the room were handsome and on the antique order. The carved mahogany sideboard almost filled the end of the apartment. On either side of the wide chimney were recesses whose shelves were filled with choice china and glass. There were a few fine pictures, two small stands with bowls of flowers, and in one corner an immense palm.

“I hope you are going to like our little town and the inhabitants thereof, Miss Grant,” Mr.



Underwood began with a half smile. He had a strong resolute face midway in coloring, hazel eyes, brown hair, and mustache with rather long curling ends. Helen hesitated a little now about first impressions, and the assurance of early youth.

"I like what I have seen of the town. Mr. Hildreth has kindly given us a drive about. Some of the pretty streets suggest the place where I was first at school—boarding-school."

"Yes," appended Miss Craven. "I thought of that also."

"Did you go from there to college?" Mr. Underwood inquired of Helen.

"Yes. But meanwhile a great surprise occurred to me. My father, who had been abroad many years, returned for a brief visit to oversee a book on Orientalism which was being published in this country, and died. I was a sort of amanuensis to him. Afterward I went back to school."

"Did you get in without any conditions?" he asked.

"There were two, but they hinged on a



different method of teaching," she answered quietly.

"And she went from the freshmen to the juniors, skipping a year," explained Mr. Hildreth with a touch of satisfaction.

"Some of that was due to my father's training. It was excellent, but not altogether pleasant," and Helen glanced up with a half smile.

"The difference between a man's and a woman's training, I suppose."

Now Helen really laughed. "I think there isn't so much difference after all. We had both kinds at the college. Two of the women were very exigent, rigid, and hard to get on with. The men frighten you a little at first, they do not seem to understand how ignorant you are and forget how many years they have gone over the same thing. I thought Greek simply awful when I began it with my father, but a Columbia student took me in hand while I was visiting his sister, and smoothed the way so that I went on quite readily."

Helen blushed with a feeling of undue frankness.



"I suppose you were both in college," looking at Miss Craven.

"Oh, no," she answered readily. "I became convinced that I was not meant for a college girl and there were other things for me, other duties. We were at school together."

"And we have made a league of friendship that has lasted almost seven years," Helen exclaimed eagerly. "She has offered me her home——" then she paused.

"Why, this is quite a romance," declared Mrs. Underwood mirthfully. "Don't you mean ever to marry?"

"I think it depends greatly upon who asks us," returned Helen archly. "Since careers are open to women, there may be a choice."

"But do you not think married life the ideal for women?" asked Mrs. Underwood. "Oh, you are so young yet!"

"I have seen some marriages that were not ideal at all, and one charming one came to our college last year."

Helen glanced up at Mr. Hildreth.



"You mean Professor Yarrow? Underwood, I had him up here three or four years ago, a Columbia man, rather overworked then. We had met in Germany."

"Yes," Mr. Underwood nodded.

"And he has a rarely attractive wife who was president of a college. She makes a most genial and felicitous home," said Mr. Hildreth.

"That scores one for me," laughed Mrs. Underwood. "You see she wasn't satisfied with a career."

"And she was in a State where the women voted, and had the right to hold office," appended Helen.

"Oh, Miss Grant, did she convert you to suffrage?" asked Mr. Underwood. "Are you strong-minded?"

"Well—I think I am not quite the ivy kind," she returned deliberately. "I like strength enough to stand up straight and decide some things for myself. Suffrage didn't seem to spoil Mrs. Yarrow—do you not agree with me, Mr. Hildreth?"

"She is among the charming women I have



met, a womanly woman, though I do not quite like the term. A Wordsworthian woman."

"And what may that be?" asked Mrs. Underwood, glancing up in surprise.

"Oh, Laura!" exclaimed her husband impatiently. "I recommend a course of Wordsworth to you."

" ' Nobly planned  
To warn, to counsel and command,' "

quoted Mr. Hildreth.

"Oh, yes, I knew that, too," a little vexed. "You can't remember everything on the spur of the moment."

"I suppose you have had a run abroad?" inquired Mr. Underwood, changing the current, and turning to Helen.

"No, I have not," she returned with inspiriting frankness. "My father had planned to take me back with him and I should have been immured in classic shades, poring over and transcribing the literature and the deeds of a thousand or two years ago. I should not have liked it. And I do desire to see somewhat of my own country first."



"We have been spending a month in Canada. Mrs. Underwood has relatives in Montreal."

"We went up as far as Quebec," said Helen, "from Niagara Falls."

That was an interesting subject and they could all join in it. Certainly Helen had used her eyes and her thoughts to some purpose. Mr. Hildreth watched her with interest, though he kept up little asides with Miss Craven.

The luncheon had been very delightful, served quietly by Mrs. Ruden in a really dignified manner. The fruit was delicious.

"Now you must come out and see my garden," said Mr. Hildreth. "Are you interested in flowers as well?"

"I've been living among them most of the summer. Miss Craven is an enthusiast, a worker with rare and beautiful things."

"I like them all, but I have a tender passion for roses. I keep them in a succession of bloom—not the same roses all the time," smiling, "though I have found several perpetual bloomers."



"Mr. Hildreth would have made a fine florist," said Mr. Underwood.

There was a broad paved path through the center, the driveway being at the other side of the grounds, leading direct to the stable and carriage house. There were several rose-beds with paths between them. The standards were mostly out of bloom, but showing fine foliage. There were monthly roses in profusion and in choice colors, others of larger growth, hybrids of various kinds in the most exquisite shades and perfection. Both girls were almost speechless with delight.

Mr. Hildreth gathered some of the choicest, and turning, gave them to Miss Craven with an inclination of the head. Helen had taken a few steps forward.

"What is your choice?" he asked.

"Oh, giving us roses is almost like carrying coals to Newcastle. Is that ungrateful?" with a deprecating glance. "We are not really going home, though, and Miss Craven has so many. Give me just three to wear in honor of this delightful visit."

"Where is Miss Craven's garden?"



"Up the Hudson, a short distance from the city. Kingland Manor was the old name for it, before it was divided and taken in hand by fashion. She has one of the old houses and several acres of ground, and has made it just beautiful. Every few days she sends flowers down to some of the children's homes."

"Oh!" he returned in the pause.

"She is a philanthropist, almost a missionary. That was one reason she did not want to go to college. And she did not need to, I did," looking up with laughing eyes.

"This is the choicest rose I have. It isn't a very free bloomer, but they take their time and come out to perfection."

"Oh, it is too bad to cut it. But there are two more buds." She glanced up entreatingly.

"If I were twenty years younger I should say, 'Not too good for you.' Being an elderly man——"

"You are not old!" she exclaimed resentfully.

"I did not say I was," laughing softly. "I shall be sorry to grow old, though I shall try not to lose my interest in daily life. It is



supposed that is a woman's regret, but I think a man may share it."

He cut another half-opened rose.

"Now only one more. Oh, I wish Mrs. Yarrow were here!"

"You like her very much?"

"She is charming. Fresh and natural. But I have found a good many delightful people in the world. And I seem somehow to keep them. I shall have to stop somewhere or I am afraid I shall grow too diffusive."

"I wouldn't stop yet. I wondered a little at the professor's good fortune."

"Did you?" The girl wondered as well.

"You see she was not needing a home, and she had a fine future before her. Well, I suppose they both fell in love, so you see love isn't dead after all."

"Another thing I rejoice in. You will think me a romantic old fellow. Tell me how your friend came into such a fortune,—or was she born to it?"

"In a certain way she was. An old uncle of penurious habits died and she was the only heir. But the home she bought. She widened



out her life and has taken others in, and she enjoys that part of it thoroughly. She loves beauty and music, and the best of living."

The flower garden ended there and was succeeded by fruit and vegetables. The others had paused to talk and now came up with them. Mr. Hildreth looked at his watch.

"Suppose we go to the school. The sun has kindly tempered his glare by some drifting clouds. It is not very far."

"Oh, you can see the tower! Yes, I should like to go."

Helen felt that the time was passing rapidly, though she would have wished to go in and examine the books and talk about them.

"Don't be so formal as to put on your hats. I go about with a parasol. We are a sort of law unto ourselves. I have heard that discarding headgear is excellent for the hair, and I do not want to reach the period when I shall have to buy a wig. I believe they are awfully expensive," and Mrs. Underwood faced the two others with comic gravity.

"We used to do a great deal of that at college. I thought it quite a saving on hats.



They didn't get old and faded so soon," returned Helen.

"Hear that! And yet men think women have no real sense of economy!"

"But you spend more on the next one," said her husband with a laughing nod.

"Hats, like everything else, have gone up. I don't know, though," with an air of consideration, "I have heard that my grandmother gave twenty dollars for a leghorn hat without a bit of trimming."

"And I have read that they lasted years and years," added Helen with a little laugh.

They passed some very inviting-looking houses and flower gardens. Women were sitting on the porches, sewing or tending a baby, and many of them nodded smilingly. They turned and went down, crossing a trolley road that led up to the small town above.

The new part of the building was quite imposing. Mr. Underwood had the key and opened the door. There was a wide stairway leading above, but on the lower floor were three large rooms divided by sliding doors, open now, and they certainly looked attractive.



The large windows and the oak finishing made it light and cheerful. Through one of them there was an entrance to the grammar school.

Above there were class-rooms well appointed. On the third floor were a laboratory, a library, and a gymnasium.

"I suppose we look small to you," began Mr. Underwood, turning to Helen, "but you must not despise the day of small things. When we number a hundred pupils we shall feel quite grand. We do not begin with that."

"But it is all so nice, and fresh, and cheerful with the many windows. I shall like it, I am sure! And you have quite spacious courts for both schools," Helen returned cheerfully.

"We hope to gather in our pupils who have been compelled to stray off, and perhaps some others may be tempted. Newton High School was overcrowded last year and they had talked of building an addition this year, but so far I have heard nothing about it. I think we went ahead and frightened them," turning to Mr. Hildreth, who nodded smilingly.

Then they inspected the grammar department, which showed the wear and tear of



years. The kindergarten was very bright and interesting with its pictures and other appointments, its shelves of the children's work.

This was quite new, Helen confessed, and seemed like a different world.

"It is really the most interesting part of all," declared Mrs. Underwood. "I come in now and then and see the children at their work. If I were going to teach, it would be in the kindergarten."

"And I should want pupils that could understand and think for themselves, and take a fervent interest in all matters."

"Training schools turn out the most satisfactory kindergartners. It is a branch by itself. Women do the best at it, though the greatest writers on the subject have been men."

Helen smiled to herself, thinking of her village school. And it was not so long ago either. Were they doing much better at Hope?

"I wonder if you would like to drop into the library for a brief call? It is on our way."



“Why, yes. I have a peculiar interest in libraries.”

It was a very pretty building. The main room was admirably arranged with alcoves, in each of which there were a table and several inviting chairs. Two or three of them looked cozy with their readers. The adjoining room was given over to papers and magazines, and quite a number of boys were here who smiled and nodded to Mr. Underwood.

Mrs. Vail, the librarian, was very affable and introduced her two assistants. One other was taking a vacation. They were nice interesting-looking girls. Helen thought she should miss the wide range, but perhaps here would be what she needed.

“I wonder if there will be time to see the lady you spoke of?” she said to Mr. Hildreth. “I liked the idea of having a little solitude to myself.”

“You will like Mrs. Stirling, I think. She is rather of the old school and yet keeps up to the times in most things. Yes, we had better go at once. And from there it is not far to the station.”



"I am very glad to have seen you," declared Mrs. Underwood cordially. "I hope you will like us and feel at home. And we must see a good deal of you. I'm very fond of company, but I enjoy a few at a time, and even one suffices, if that one is congenial. I know I shall like you."

"Thank you," smiling. "But you had better reserve your verdict until——"

"Oh, I'm pretty sure of my conclusions. I either like or I don't like," and she gave a piquant nod.

Helen had a little talk with Mr. Underwood.

"School opens on the eighth," he said, "but it would be well to come the week before."

"Yes, I shall," returned Helen. "I want to get a little at home in my new surroundings."

"I hope all will go smoothly. You need not hesitate to apply to me for anything, as it will be a rather new line to you. You will find me ready and friendly," in a kindly tone.

"And I shall be grateful for a little counsel



among the new ways. Thank you for the pleasant meeting. I am very glad it could be planned this way."

"We are going off to the sea for a fortnight or so. I hope you will have a pleasant time until our next meeting," and they parted cordially.

The Stirling home was an old-fashioned colonial place, with a piazza across the front and a hall running through the middle. The parlor was rather stiff, with handsome old-time furniture and a carpet of the medallion pattern, the colors having softened with years. The sitting-room had a southern exposure, had more modern furnishings, and was decidedly cheerful. Mrs. Stirling had a very sweet, placid face, not without character, and was perhaps fifty, quite tall and rather thin, with beautiful soft brown eyes.

The dining-room was also toward the south and overlooked the flower garden, brilliant with old-time growth and bloom. She took Helen upstairs for inspection.

"You can have this room—I think it the pleasanter of the two guest chambers for win-



ter. Mine is the adjoining one. I have had two cousins staying with me for several years. One married and the other went with her. And now—I do not suppose it will be any objection—I am to have a niece spend the winter with me and study in the high school. She has been teaching two years in a country school, but is ambitious for something higher and desirous of a change as well. So she begged me to take her in for this year, and I do not enjoy being quite alone. I like some human interest, yet I am not one to go outside for it.”

“Why, I think I shall like that. I have been used to living with a great crowd of girls and taking part in their joys and sorrows and advancement. Oh, I should have no objection, but I think I would not have any right since she is your relative,” and she glanced up brightly.

“I should try to make you comfortable. I have an excellent domestic and matters generally go on smoothly.”

Helen viewed the room. Two windows looked eastward, two south. The hangings



were simple white drapery, the furniture was mahogany, a fine bureau with a large glass, a dressing-table, a sort of center table for books and papers, an old étagère for books, and two inviting willow rockers. A large clothes closet opened into the room. There were a few small fancy belongings, altogether it had a cheerful aspect and Helen thought she would soon feel at home, so the bargain was ratified, and she rejoined the two who had strayed over to the sitting-room with a smiling face.

Mr. Hildreth nodded in a kind of satisfied manner, with the pleasure one feels when he has succeeded. He liked Mrs. Stirling a great deal and had spent many a pleasant evening with her.

“I want to thank you again,” Helen began, with a winsome frankness that was part of her nature. “I think I shall like my new home very much—and my new duties. You have taken a good deal of trouble——”

“Oh, you must not think of that. I took quite as much trouble, as you call it, for a candidate who thought she had a right to the place, and who did not come up to the require-



ments. You know this was really my business. We want to make the school a success from the very start, and outgrow the current of opposition, rather jealous," with a faint smile. "As for the rest I am glad to have done anything for you, for I feel that you will help us to success."

"I hope I shall merit your good opinion. You have given us a most delightful day. It seems a friendly visit rather than a business matter."

Helen consulted her watch. "We had better take this first train," glancing at Juliet. "Can we reach the station in fifteen minutes?"

"Ten minutes will give you ample time," said Mr. Hildreth.

She went to the dining-room where Mrs. Stirling was sitting, who came and bade them a friendly farewell. The walk was a pleasant one, the talk on general subjects. They had to wait some moments for the train, and studied the opposite banks of the river where the ground rose gently. Just now it was a world of glowing beauty as the westward sun



shone upon it, bringing out shades of iridescent green, somber purples, and suggestions of brownish red. Here and there was a group of cottages with a white church standing in the midst, the nucleus of some future town. Then stretches of farming land, stubble fields in gold, woodlands that stood out in a kind of suggestive darkness as if holding some weird mystery in their depths. How beautiful it all was!

"It is a picture for an artist!" exclaimed Helen with a long breath.

Then the train came rushing down and the good-byes were said. There were plenty of seats on the down train at this time of day.

"I like your Mr. Hildreth so much," Juliet said. "Helen, how do you manage to meet such attractive people?"

"He isn't *my* Mr. Hildreth," and Helen gave an arch smile. "And I don't manage. They just come to me. Did you like Mr. Underwood?"

"Not as well. He is a trifle ironical and has the air of being able to say a good deal more on the subject than he chooses to.



Probably he could. I hope you will get along nicely with him. Has Mrs. Underwood grown used to his comments or doesn't she understand them?"

"I think she does not. She has a very good opinion of herself. She isn't at all intellectual, but she is bright and takes a rather humorous view of life. I shall get along, though I think Mr. Underwood doesn't quite approve of me."

"Why—he spoke very highly of you," said Juliet in surprise.

"Of my attainments. My credentials were first-class," laughing. "And they wanted some one they could refer to with a certain pride, but Mr. Underwood wants to know a great deal the most. One gets a variety of experience in four years, with hundreds of girls and professors of both sexes. I haven't had any with boys. He has had a great deal. I can defer to him in this matter. A public school is in a way co-educative."

"You will have a nice home, I am glad of that."

"Yes, I am quite sure to like it. Think



how many homes I have had!" and a gleam of amusement flitted over her face. "So I am quite used to changes. Oh! there is a niece coming, a girl who has taught a country school for two years and wants to go up higher."

"Another one for you to train?"

"Well, it is rather interesting, also. And I have had so many nice things done for me."

"I hope she will not bore you to death with love matters."

"Oh, if she had a lover I think she would want to stay in the country. On the whole I rather like it, and if she is not an agreeable girl I need not fraternize warmly with her. O dear! I wonder if I shall long for the pleasant pastures of Mrs. Aldred. Well, we have had a most delightful day. And Mr. Hildreth's rose garden was splendid. But I can't get over thinking if the fates had given him Mrs. Yarrow for a wife, how fine and satisfactory his life would have been."

"And what of the professor?"

They both laughed at that.



## CHAPTER III

### A NEW EXPERIENCE

It was a very warm early September, as usual. Summer generally persists in lapping over. To Helen, for whom summer had been holidays, the early work was trying. She had reached her new home the middle of the week before school began. Lilian Firth seemed already at home with her aunt, but rather shy and in awe of a college young woman. A rather unformed girl, who had passed her twenty-first birthday and was beginning to feel old about it. Medium in every respect, neither pretty nor exactly plain, fresh and fair, with rather sad eyes when she was quiet, but they could light up with pleasure and occasionally a glint of humor.

Helen was quite a revelation to Lilian Firth. "Why, she seems just like a young girl and she is so bright and joyous!" she said in sur-



prise to her aunt. "And she doesn't wear glasses and look you all over as if she was turning you inside out. I am sure I shall like her."

"There is no reason why you shouldn't, as far as I can see," returned Mrs. Stirling with a smile.

The two last days of the week they were registering pupils. Miss Parker, the vice-principal, was on hand, and the kindergarten directress. Some of the other teachers dropped in much interested in the new high school.

"It will be rather confusing for a while," explained Mr. Underwood. "You see, some of the scholars have been two years in the other schools and it will not do to set them back. We should stir up a hornet's nest," and he gave his shoulders a little shrug. "It will be more difficult than if we could begin with them all in the first year and go on. There are different methods in teaching the same thing."

"Do you intend they shall be prepared for college?" she asked.

"That would be a great honor for us though



I do not believe many of them will go. Yes—I'd like the scholarship high. Our children generally come out finely. There were twenty-seven graduates. I'm sorry that some of the best ones are going into business, four boys who could do excellent work on educational lines. Five or six from the other school. A few of last year's graduates, and some new people who have moved in. Miss Jaynes will have the lower class. And occasionally I might ask a little help from you."

She nodded graciously.

Miss Firth's education had been on desultory lines. Higher algebra, Latin, and chemistry were new branches to her. She colored painfully in admitting her lack.

"You see I taught what was necessary, the common branches. They were mostly farmers' children. There was a paper mill and two hat shops, where the boys went as soon as they were old enough. But the examinations called for things that I really did know about. You wouldn't want to teach them either. Now they have taken a young woman from the normal school. I had half



a mind to try that—I have a little money of my own. There was another reason——”

She turned crimson at that and her eyes drooped.

“It was a dull country place,” seeming to gather up her forces of self-control. “I don’t suppose you ever lived in the real country?”

“Oh, yes,” with a bright smile. “Three miles from my uncle’s farm was the real town of Hope, and I was eager to go to the high school there. I would have been willing to work for a friend for my board. Then quite a romance happened to me and I was sent to a boarding school. Sometime, if you like, I will tell you about it. I was hungry for an education. Do you mean to follow teaching?”

“Why, yes—I suppose so,” but there was no enthusiasm in the tone. “There’s no one to take care of me. There were only two of us—’Lisha and I. He kept the farm, bought it in at the auction, and the five hundred dollars that came to me is in it. He has a nice enough wife but she cares nothing about reading or what she calls the ‘fancy things,’ but she keeps the children real nice. ’Lisha helped me get



the school. You see they couldn't pay much salary, and they only needed the common branches. The girls get married as soon as they can and live good, useful lives. I sometimes wonder if there is any need of so much education among country farming people. They need to know reading, writing, and arithmetic, and how to raise the most profitable crops and fruit that sells readily. 'Lisha's a master hand at this. He'll be a well-to-do man. Mother, who was Aunt Stirling's sister, died young and father had a stroke that he never got over. Aunt Emma married Mr. Stirling, who was a rich man, and came here to live. She asked me once before to come with her, but—well, I dare say I shall tell you sometime. I had a lover and we were engaged. 'Lisha said we were too poor to marry, but we could have started in buying a little farm with my money. We had it planned out. Then Mary Yates's father died and left her a nice farm. *He* had been working there, I don't just know how it was, but she managed to get him. He was real nice-looking and had a good voice, and sang in church. So did she. She was



four years older than he, but there are not so many chances in country places. Well, they went off and were married, but she held her head very high about it. Then I found I couldn't keep the school, though I had been studying some of the new things. I did not want to go to work in the hat shop, and I didn't want to stay. So I wrote to Aunt Emma. She was very good about taking me and thought after more study I could get a better position. I am glad that I came and I mean to do my best. I suppose I could go in a store at Barnford, but I know only one girl in that place. She likes it ever so much. But it seems better to stay here with Aunt Emma. They all said that I made a very good teacher and were sorry to have me go. I don't believe the young woman will like it over much."

It was a commonplace, rather pitiful story. Lilian Firth fancied her life wrecked. She was one of the girls who could be perfectly content with a home and husband of her own. He need not be very high up in the intellectual round, she had no strong leanings that way herself.



Then Helen recalled Miss Trevor of her freshman year. There was a girl who had put love and home above the opportunities of advancement. She *was* a different kind of girl, but this one might be roused to attempt something.

“I suppose you think me a silly thing to care so much about—about what I have lost. I told Aunt Emma, and she said that five years from this time I shall be glad and thankful that I didn’t marry him. She thought my mother had thrown herself away. She was very pretty, too, Aunt Emma says. But somehow I can’t get over all the hopes and the love, and in five years I shall be quite an old maid. I’m sure that Miss Parker must be near forty. And Miss Jaynes isn’t young.”

“There are a great many fine and happy single women nowadays.”

Miss Firth was dabbing her eyes. Helen felt truly sorry for her and could understand how great a sorrow it had been; but she hardly knew how to sympathize with her. A man won from his allegiance by a little personal advancement was really not worth a girl’s re-



gret. And Mrs. Stirling was minded to be very good to her.

There had been a week of school now. Helen felt weary and stole off by herself, turning to the north, and was soon lost in a clump of woods. There was a winding path and it led down to the river. Up above Westfield it was navigable only for smaller craft, and here was a bridge for driving and pedestrians. It looked so peaceful and smiling, lighted by the afternoon sunshine.

"I do not believe there is anything to be afraid of," she reflected. "I want to get away from the thought of school. It has been a trying week. Mr. Underwood seems to let me severely alone."

She hardly knew whether to be pleased or not.

Mr. Underwood was amazed at the order she had brought out of chaos. He had been very busy as well, getting scholars into the traces after the long vacation. And she had seemed quite sufficient for the task. But a word of friendly commendation would have done her so much good!



After she had crossed the bridge she kept along by the river road. Blue chicory was still showing blooms and the wood asters were beginning to come out. Here were patches of the old-time Bouncing Bet in deep as well as pale pink. Minor small flowers were throwing out bloom, blackberry branches were bright with autumnal crimson already. Here and there a maple showed a limb of gorgeous coloring. There was a trickle of a stream, the road had been bridged over. A pretty runlet came crookedly down the elevation, turned this side and that by stones, fretting around them, leaping, dancing, laughing almost like some living thing. Why, it was quite a fairy spot, and she smiled herself, it appealed so to her. Here were some dainty wild flowers quite new to her, and she gathered them for examination.

The girls were pouring into the dear old college now, and she longed to be among them, only life could not be all pleasure and gratification if you meant to do anything with it. Why, it had been several weeks since she had heard from Leslie. She hoped all things were



going well with her, but why not? Mr. Morse could be trusted to the uttermost. And did Miss Carr like her new position? Oh, what delightful days and weeks those had been! She sat down on a great stone and lived them over. A squirrel came and peered at her out of his flashing, beady eyes, and far in the still woods the thrushes were answering one another. She clasped her arms about her knees and took it all in,—just rested. What a nook of refuge it was! How all the cares and perplexities fell away!

A vehicle of some sort went crunching along. She did not look up, but the occupant glanced out and held in the horses that came to a standstill. She was startled—no, she would not stir nor look. But the driver sprang out.

“Miss Grant, are you lost like the babes in the wood?” said a familiar voice.

“Oh, Mr. Hildreth! There isn’t but one of me. And I have only to walk down a little distance and cross the bridge when I shall be safe in the very shadow of the school that I ran away from.”

“Were you disgusted?”





SHE KEPT ALONG BY THE RIVER ROAD. — *Page 55.*







She laughed wholesomely.

"That is rather too strong a word, hardly fair to my scholars. I was tired of the whirl and didn't want to speak to any one. Then I wanted to see what was over here. I thought I would take a walk, but instead this small stream and the great stone wooed me, so I sat down and dreamed."

"Did you come alone?" in quick inquiry.

"Why—yes." Had she been venturesome?  
"I wanted the solitude."

"Women and girls go berrying. But you are not used to the country," in a light tone of solicitude.

"Nor the ways, perhaps. I truly do not want to do 'anything reprehensible.'" She rose then. "Perhaps I had better retrace my steps. But I am a country girl of the fearless kind. And I have quite recovered my right mind, my placid temper."

"Has it been pretty hard? And such summer weather! I was coming in this evening to see how you endured it."

"There has been a great deal of confusion getting pupils in their right places and listening



to what was done at Newton and Glendale. The two-year pupils seem to be endued with all wisdom. But we shall get settled presently."

"I am going up to Rossmore. Let me take you along. It is a beautiful drive; a little late perhaps, but it is not far. And we can talk at our leisure."

She hesitated, but he took hold of her arm and led her to the carriage and helped her in, and the horses started up.

"What is Rossmore?" she asked with a little wonder.

"A sort of—well, hamlet. I like the old English term. Three or four hundred people. A church, a chapel, a schoolhouse, a drug store, a country store, a baseball ground,—oh, and a blacksmith shop. The rest in residences—men, women, and children. Am I not good in description?"

"Terse and concise," with amusement in her tone.

"And at six, or a little before, the smith is to pay me some borrowed money."

She flushed deeply. "I did not mean to in-



quire what was taking you there. Pardon me."

"I think you did not. This is a very good, upright man. But I have more time than he has, and he asked me to come. And now let me satisfy my curiosity about school matters. How has it gone this week? Mr. Underwood said last evening you had really worked wonders in getting things into shape."

"Did he say that? You and he are warm friends." Her face flushed with pleasure.

"Quite old friends, with a good deal of respect for each other. And I dare say you were a little homesick."

"For my cloistered walls. That is poetical. I can understand how men love to spend years in the familiar precincts. Some day I may return and take up the new sciences and discoveries. But now I am getting fitted into my place here."

"The young lady at Mrs. Stirling's is not going to bore you, I hope."

"Oh, no! They are both very nice and thoughtful." Then after a pause, "I suppose you know the Eastmans?"



"Very well. The father is a fine man. They are about the richest people in town. I wish they had half a dozen children instead of that one. Only sons are apt to come to grief. I wish they had sent him to some of those semi-military schools. You haven't had trouble with him already?"

"No, though I scent it afar off. He seems to have quite ruled the school at Glendale by his talk. And he expects to take his own way in his studies."

"Mr. Underwood had some trouble with him two years ago. He can study if he chooses."

"He doesn't seem well up in Latin and his German is something fearful. I am afraid I am telling tales out of school. But it is a mistake to let your scholars consider themselves proficient when they have the merest smattering of any study."

"If there is any trouble turn him over to Mr. Underwood."

"I do not want Mr. Underwood to think I am deficient in discipline. But I have had no experience with large boys, you know. I have



heard this is frequently the way with a new teacher; they try her mettle," with a faint smile.

"Such boys need a man for everything. On the other hand, we have so many more girls than boys that a woman seems the proper thing. Oh, I wonder if I have given you a burden that is too heavy."

"Why, no! no! And some of them seem most eager to learn. There is a fine scholar in a little lame boy, Allen Millard. I've taken a great fancy to him. And some of the boys are very chivalrous. What are the outside amusements?"

"I suppose there will be a baseball club."

"And isn't there a tennis court? We girls did almost everything. Shall I startle you by saying we had running contests, leaping, jumping, basketball, outdoor exercise as well as the gymnasium?" and there was a touch of daring amusement in her tone.

"You are a good exponent of the regimen," and she colored under the gaze that seemed almost examination, yet was in no wise presuming.



"Here we are. I will fasten the horses so you will not be run away with. Do you ride? You can drive, of course?"

"Yes, we even learned to ride at college. We had theories about cooking, though I believe there is to be a branch for that. But most of us could mend and darn in case we were reduced to that for an occupation, or married," raising laughing eyes.

It did not take long to transact his business in a satisfactory manner, and Mr. Hildreth rejoined her.

"Now we will take a spin," he said, "and cross the upper bridge."

The sky was aflame with the glory of a brilliant sunset that fairly gilded the trees. And the dew, though scarcely perceptible, filled the air with innumerable fragrances. Helen's pulse grew buoyant, and the perplexities vanished. After crossing the bridge they went on to the upper road, the back road in the town parlance. They came down then to Milford Street, and at the gate he paused.

"You have given me a most delightful afternoon, and I thank you very much.



Don't disturb yourself," and she sprang out lightly.

"It has been a great pleasure to me. And if there comes any trouble I beg most earnestly that you will let me know. I feel to a degree answerable for your comfort. Good-evening."

She went around to the side gate where a porch ran across the end of the dining-room, and a door opened into it.

"Oh, Miss Grant! We thought maybe you had gone home with Mrs. Underwood to dinner. She was asking for you."

"Was she? I took a walk; crossed the bridge to see what was on the other side."

"It's rather late to be out alone. Still I must say we are very free from tramps. We had a workhouse two or three years ago and after that the gentry gave us a wide berth. But the other side belongs to a different county and we cannot answer for that."

Helen felt her face flush. Was her ride quite within the bounds of propriety, she wondered. It had been so unexpected, and she felt so entirely friendly with Mr. Hildreth. Lilian was in the kitchen helping her aunt, as



the domestic had gone home to spend the night with her sick mother.

"I do not know that it was quite good judgment," Helen replied gravely. "But, you see, I was brought up in the country and used to going about without a thought. It makes a person rather fearless. Oh, I hope you were not anxious!"

"We thought you at the Underwoods', of course."

Helen wondered if it was quite right to allow the matter to rest that way. Yet she was not supposed to give an account of her comings and goings. She was a young woman quite on her own responsibility. Still she did not want to give cause for any foolish gossip. But Mr. Hildreth was delightful in that elderly, sensible fashion, like the professors. A young lad could be proffered the run of the house, the acquaintanceship with the books. She could almost envy the imaginary young lad.

"Supper is all ready," announced the niece.

Helen ran upstairs and laid off her hat; she longed to put on a fresh shirtwaist, but she



would not keep Mrs. Stirling waiting, and she had seen the omelet brought in. They kept to the old-fashioned midday dinner, but there was always some tidbit for supper.

"Oh, Miss Grant, are you not glad the school week has ended?" asked Lilian. "It has seemed such a long week."

"A short week to me. I haven't made the progress I meant to or thought quite possible. And I want us all to start in next week in good earnest and accomplish something."

Lilian sighed. "It is going to be hard work. Do you think the Latin will be of any service to me? I do not believe half the teachers study it."

"You see the high school course is laid out partly for college entrance and the higher education. It helps in various ways in training the mind. You are very good in some branches. When you get into the regular groove you will not find it so hard."

"I should never teach it."

"Why not take the kindergarten course? And there are other things—office work, stenography, typewriting, bookkeeping."



"I like school-teaching because you have your Saturdays. And there is the long vacation, the being with other people."

"And as you have taken it up, Lilian," said her aunt, "I would go on. I shall be glad to have you here, so you need not worry about a home. And educated people *do* rank a little higher in the social scale, though that should not be the highest incentive," smiling a little.

"Try it for a year," subjoined Helen.

"I'm glad Miss Parker is not my teacher. She looks as if she might be quite cross. Miss Jaynes is very pleasant," Lilian remarked after a while.

Miss Jaynes was the assistant. A round, rosy, smiling girl of four or five and twenty, with an easy, attractive manner. Helen thought she should like her as well.

They were just through supper when a lad came with a note for Miss Grant.

Mrs. Underwood wished her to come to luncheon the next day and meet Miss Parker. Just a plain informal matter, to talk "shop" a little.

Helen returned an acceptance. They had a



pleasant, quiet evening, she comfortably ensconced in the corner of the commodious sofa, while Mrs. Stirling talked of the changes in Westfield since her coming and the legends that had grown up around some of the old settlers. The Stirlings had been among these, nearly two hundred years before. She had a very pleasant voice, and though tinctured with some formalisms was really an interesting talker.



## CHAPTER IV

### MISS PARKER

THE Underwoods lived in a pretty cottage not far from the school, but some distance below Milford Street. Helen was ushered into the parlor by the hostess, who looked really very girlish in her white gown much be-ruffled.

"Of course you have met Miss Parker, but I thought it would be nice to take a meal together. You see I dispense with a maid. They are a good deal of vexation and awfully expensive nowadays. We take our dinner out at night, it saves a great deal of planning. Breakfast and lunch I don't mind, ours are rather simple affairs. Saturday is my guest day, as I have a woman all the morning."

"That must make the wheels of housekeeping run very smoothly," said Helen. "I admire the plan."



“Only if your guest was a busy housekeeper herself——” remarked Miss Parker. “For us who have Saturdays off it is very convenient.”

“But, you see, I don’t give big dinners and all that. It may be selfish to plan your life with direct reference to your own convenience, but why shouldn’t one? You have to live your own life, no friend can live it for you. I always stay at home one day in the week unless something special occurs, so my friends know just when to find me. The other days I am at liberty to go out.”

“One would not fancy you so methodical,” commented Miss Parker.

She did not look like it with her merry face and her gay voice, and a certain offhand air. Now she laughed lightly.

“I’ve been trained into it. Mr. Underwood likes a settled routine. You know just where to find yourself. I did protest at first, but I found it was a real saving of nervous force. And perhaps it will keep me young. I should hate to wear out before my time.”

“It is fortunate that you can take life



this way. Now if you were the school-teacher——”

“Ah! You see I had no grand ideas of renovating the world in those youthful days. I wanted a home and a pleasant life, a husband not too exigent. Miss Grant, is this heresy to your thinking?”

Helen smiled. “It sounds very pleasant,” she said.

“What is pleasant?” Mr. Underwood entered the room and shook hands first with Helen, as she was nearest. “If it is the past week, you are made of excellent material.”

“Indeed it is not,” protested his wife. “I was airing my ideas of setting out with the ordinary aim, not demanding too much, and working with all your mind and heart to get the thing you merit.”

“I suppose, then, Miss Grant agreed with you.”

“Every one may not have the same aim or be satisfied with the same—shall we call it destiny? But I think it a good plan to set out earnestly for some particular thing.”

“In my case it was the husband.”



She looked up at him with a merry glint in her eyes.

“And you see how well she succeeded.”

“I shall advise them to go and do likewise.”

“I don’t know how I would manage without Miss Parker. But if the man was admirable in every respect——”

“They are not all admirable,” Miss Parker returned rather shortly, with a touch of disgust.

“The banquet waits,” announced Mrs. Underwood at a signal from her impromptu maid. “I sent word to Miss Grant that you would talk shop. It won’t bore me at all. I know you must want to compare notes.”

Mr. Underwood seated the ladies. The dainty oysters at each place looked tempting.

“Did you find it very severe, Miss Grant? I looked for you to offer a word of condolence, but you disappeared so suddenly. And no one seemed to know where you had gone.”

Helen flushed a little at the thought of her escapade, if indeed it was that.

“Why,” hesitatingly, “I had not counted



on tranquil seas and smooth sailing. We were all strangers and I had to learn, or at least make allowance for their ways and training of which I knew next to nothing."

"And the heat was enough to drive one half crazy," added Miss Parker. "I don't know that we ever had such a bad beginning. There were five new children from over the river, but I sincerely wish they had not been granted the privilege. I do not believe they can keep their standing."

"Scholarship is not very high over there," nodded Mr. Underwood. "There is a Miss Winters, Georgia Winters, who graduated and has spent a year in a private school. Can you recall her, Miss Grant?"

Helen thought a moment. "My mind is not quite a directory yet," she returned laughingly.

"A tall girl, with rather pretty chestnut hair that just missed being red. Her mother considers her a very fine scholar, quite proficient in Latin and French."

"Oh! I think I can recall her. She must be sixteen at least."



"Yes. Her mother thought a year in the high school would enable her to graduate."

"The first form in Latin is going to be rather full," began Helen dryly. "Unless——"

"They must be rated according to their attainments. We cannot begin by lowering *our* standard. And you will not be able to find their exact places at once."

"And how do you like boys?" asked Miss Parker.

Helen flushed. "I have known a good many and grew up with some of them."

"But a woman's college must be very different from—well, a public school."

Miss Parker had a little soreness of heart. She wished she had been able to fill the place. There had been no room for college in her busy life. She had taught eighteen years, working up from a primary grade in the larger town of Camden. She had been here eight years. Mr. Underwood soon learned her capabilities and had her promoted. Last year she could have been principal in a smaller school but there was no higher salary. She



liked to work with Mr. Underwood, and he thoroughly appreciated her. She was a fine disciplinarian, an excellent teacher.

"I should like to see you at the head of this new school," he had said to her, "but I should miss you tremendously. We pull together so harmoniously, we fall so into each other's methods. But they have decided upon a graduate fresh from college. I suppose it is needed. We go in for the higher things nowadays, and we do want to turn out first-class scholarship."

"Yes, I should be proud to fill such a position. But I couldn't construe a page of Latin or write an hexameter, and I have just a smattering of several 'ologies. I had a vague idea once that I would study up in the higher branches, but I guess my knowledge will suffice me. When I get sufficient money saved I shall retire," with an abrupt and rather scornful laugh, "or some inconsolable widower may take pity on me and offer me a home."

Marcia Parker's sad little romance had leaked out. Some friend who had known her



told it to her credit. There had been a partially paralyzed mother and an old father, and two brothers who felt free to marry as soon as they were in any position to support a wife. She had struggled along until the old father dropped out of life. For years a lover had waited and then his ardor cooled. A bright young girl had captured him. Marcia had come to Westfield with her mother to get away from the gossip and the sympathy that grated horribly on her nerves. Three years after Mr. Underwood came she found herself free from care, and had met with honest appreciation in her work. Now she kept two rooms and took her meals with the family, truly glad of the relief from housekeeping.

Miss Grant's credentials had been of so high an order there could be no question as to her capabilities. Mr. Hildreth was too wise a man to arouse any opposition by undue praise.

"She is very young for the position," the principal said, in a tone of surprise. But she had been asked and accepted.

Miss Parker was more than surprised at the meeting. She had fancied her six or seven



and twenty, with her post-graduate course and her high endorsement. This was what came of a free and untrammelled early womanhood. A certain jealousy tore her heart that she had trained to a grudging acceptance of fate. Not so much of the girl, bright, eager, glowing with health and courage, as all the events and prosperity that had made it possible for her to achieve so much in youth.

"She will never do!" she had said to Mr. Underwood on the second day. "The big boys will run over her. It isn't altogether knowledge,—some experience is needed."

But by Friday she had changed her mind a little, though a certain disbelief still held sway.

Mrs. Underwood had planned the luncheon. She was curious to see more of Miss Grant.

"Why, yes," answered Helen after a moment's thought, to Miss Parker's remark. "And my only experience is that of a little country girl who was studying with all her might to be able to enter the high school at Hope. But I think there is not so much difference in the requirements. Boys and girls



must stand on the same level, if they ask to be admitted to almost any college."

"There are two or three boys you will find rather tough subjects," Miss Parker said, with a secret feeling of gratulation. Then she checked herself and added,—“I'm sorry Dick Eastman has entered. Couldn't you have——”

“I tried my best to persuade his father to leave him where he was. But his mother insisted on having him here. Her contention was that a mother's influence was a great safeguard for a growing boy; her town argument, that they were paying a good deal of taxes and they had but one child to reap any benefit from it.”

“Light, street improvements, fire protection, and all that do not count, I suppose,” commented Miss Parker dryly.

“Miss Grant, this isn't exactly a conference meeting, but it may be termed a confidence. We are banded together for the best interests of the school, I hope, and in some respects to recompense Mr. Hildreth for his trouble and generosity. So we must put shoulder to shoulder, and help over the rough places.



What do you think of Eastman's scholarship? He just squeezed through the grammar school. Miss Parker and I absolutely coached him. But his parents would have been offended if he had not passed. He was the ringleader in all sorts of mischief. Of course he is older now and I hope he has outgrown his boyish pranks. How does he stand?"

Helen colored and looked up with deprecating eyes.

"Oh, you need not be afraid. I am an excellent father confessor, Miss Parker will certify."

"I thought he must have been a dull student not to have made any greater progress. There is a lame boy I like a good deal, Allen Millard. He loves to acquire."

"Yes. He was injured by a fall from a bicycle. A drunken fellow toppled him over. They were afraid at first he would lose his leg. He is a fine lad and it is a thousand pities. The Millards are some of our best citizens. The father and a grown-up son by a first marriage are excellent men. In the second family are two daughters, one older, one



younger than Allen. The older one is a promising art student."

"And so far he is very promising. Oh, you know, one can hardly tell in this little while. They are mostly anxious to reach the highest standard whether they are fitted for it or not. That savors of ambition."

"Or vanity," annotated Miss Parker rather sarcastically. "Don't let them deceive you."

"I do not depend wholly on first impressions," and she smiled.

"Only with grown-up people whose opinions are settled," said Mrs. Underwood.

"But do you not think people change? It is not all in yourself. You find they have taken up different ideas and beliefs that surprise you."

"Miss Grant is right there. And it is rather consoling to know the change is not all in ourselves," said Mr. Underwood.

The serving had gone on beautifully. Mrs. Underwood made no fuss of any kind, yet the luncheon was rather ornate for the simple announcement.

"About discipline, now," began the host,



when the dessert had come in. "How did they keep so many girls in the strait and narrow path?"

"Oh, they didn't always!" laughed Helen. "But we were self-governing, put on our honor. After the freshman year there was very little trouble as far as regarded real college rules."

"Then it wasn't so easy to break them in?"

Mr. Underwood's eyes gleamed with a sense of amused gratification.

"Quite a number come for the fun, not meaning to remain more than a year. They do prove troublesome. It seems really foolish to do that. Others find the studies and the training too severe. So a number drop out of their own accord. A few are dropped because the faculty find they have not kept up to even the lowest grade of standing. The college is for education, not amusement. The girls who enter the sophomore class the first year are those who are in real earnest."

It was easy to see that she had been, by her eyes so alight with remembered interest and her clear, convincing voice.



"I suppose girls never stray in forbidden paths?" Mr. Underwood half asserted in a doubtful tone.

"With nearly a thousand girls gathered from everywhere it would be quite impossible to have perfection. But there gets to be a certain *esprit de corps*. Then for some transgressions they are deprived of the privileges of certain clubs for a while, certain amusements. They are compelled to decline of their own volition. Nothing is said publicly, but girls soon guess."

"It isn't quite all rose-color then?"

"It depends on how much you want your roses," she answered archly.

They had been lingering over their coffee; now the hostess rose.

"I told husband he might talk shop to you a while, now I am going to have my innings. I don't care for Latin and Greek, nor biology or zoölogy—I never can tell one from the other," and she laughed gayly. "Let us talk over novels that we like, or the neighbors you have met so far. Westfield people are rather clannish. Some of the families have been



here a long while and fancy they have made and own the town."

"Laura! Laura!" exclaimed her husband warningly.

"Isn't it so? I suppose if I had come straight out of the ark to Westfield I should be telling what they did there and how much better it was than the world outside. It is an excellent thing for people to change about, I think, and find how many nice intelligent people there are in the world. Most of us who read enjoy Mrs. Gaskell's 'Cranford,' but we wouldn't care to live there. And did you ever read Hardy's 'Under the Greenwood Tree'? There are just such short-sighted, opinionated old men here, who once owned the farms, and even when they were all run down bewailed the fact that they were cut up into building lots. And elderly women, who scout a sewing machine or any modern invention."

"But they must be amusing," said Helen, with a sense of mirth.

"They are. An old man comes here to put the garden in order, and tells me how fine it was in his grandfather's time, before all the



new people came in and ruined the place. Every year now it gets ruined still more, but the new people bring a sort of saving grace with them. You'll find some very nice ones. Now Mrs. Stirling is midway between, but she wasn't to the manner born. The Stirlings have mostly all died out or gone away. She is a lady of the old school with some modern ways. But the house is most like a museum with its old furniture, and ever so much more packed in the garret. I felt glad about the niece coming. I hope she will prove a real comfort. She wants to teach—has taught, I believe."

"Yes," answered Helen.

"She will find the demands much greater than in an out-of-the-way country school," said Miss Parker.

"Will her experience do her much good?" asked Mr. Underwood.

"She will have to begin at the foundation in most things. She is a good mathematician, spells and reads excellently, has a good general knowledge of modern history, knows nothing at all about analysis and many of the branches



taught to-day. I suppose a high school education is best for her if she means to teach."

"Oh, certainly. She couldn't stand anywhere without it, unless she went out west to a new settlement, and then she would marry in six months," said the principal, with a half laugh.

"It would be a good plan to send more of them out," declared Miss Parker. "Marrying a ranchman, or a man who has preempted his tract, would be the best destiny for them."

"Then there's the Hildreth house. You didn't see much of it the day you were here," began Mrs. Underwood, returning to her own subject. "Part of it is very old, though even that has been a good deal remodeled. The kitchen has the old Dutch rafters and is big enough for two rooms, though it has the modern appliances. Then back of the library is a room of curiosities. One of the old Hildreths was a sea-faring man, never married, and lived with the old uncle. This one's father married, but the wife, I believe, was rather gay and would not live in the country. After she died he came back with his lit-



tle boy. The captain was lost at sea, the father of the little boy died away somewhere, and this Mr. Hildreth was at school and college, and then went abroad. His uncle died suddenly, but he did not return at once. He was the only heir. When he did come improvements had begun. He gave the land for the street at the side of the house, Elm Street, sold off a good deal of the property, almost rebuilt the house, and lives in solitary state with the housekeeper."

"He is a splendid public-spirited citizen, and has done more for the town than any half dozen other men," declared her husband.

"I'm not saying anything against him. I like him immensely. Only some woman ought to share the splendid old house with him. He is a man's man. Now and then he has a lot of savants and professors——"

"And they are splendid to meet. I am glad of my share of them," interrupted Mr. Underwood. "Every year or two he takes a run abroad and comes home primed with no end of new things. The woman might interfere with all this. I am truly glad to have some single



men and some single women in the world, even if home and love are the uplifts to life. All the marriages are not happy."

"Still he seems the kind of man to have a family about him," persisted the wife.

"Can you find a finer man, with such world-wide interests, doing the best for his own town and education, and the training of future citizens? He is just right as he is."

"Well, we will go on to the Goulds. There are characters for you! Miss Grant, did you ever entertain the idea of writing a book?"

"I should like to write one on astronomy. That bewitches me." returned Helen earnestly.

"Bah! I like the points of people brought out in high light. The moon and stars will go on in their courses without any help from us, though they did fight against Sisera, I believe. There are three Gould women, smart, bright, and energetic, and all past seventy. At that time of life they are really old maids."

"Laura, you do gossip beyond measure."

Mrs. Underwood tossed back her head with a gay laugh, and her eyes brimmed over with fun.



“Didn’t some famous English physician tell a patient that what she needed most was a good gossip? I often speak of good points that no one else thinks worth mentioning, and I keep no end of harmful things to myself. These women are amusing. Miss Grant, they will call on you some day. They live in one of the big old houses and each one keeps house by herself. Miss Mary is a strict vegetarian; Miss Eliza believes in fish and eggs as brain food; Miss Hetty eats everything and is round and rosy. They are not quarrelsome women. They speak of each other’s peculiarities as if they were something to be proud of. They all go to different churches. It seems to require a good deal of the grace of God to agree about religion when each one differs in the mode. Now haven’t I given them a good character?” looking up mischievously at her husband.

“They are good women and a credit to any community. I wish there were more like them,” he returned.

“Why, that is charming,” declared Helen enthusiastically. “I shall like to see them.



They really are worthy to be perpetuated in a book."

"But you must wait until they call upon you. They are quite sticklers for propriety and they consider they owe that much to the newcomers."

"Will they surely call?" the girl asked.

"Oh, yes. They are warm friends with Mrs. Stirling. They are not at all exclusive, but they never say harm of any one. Miss Hetty is a Methodist, and it would almost convert you to hear her play and sing the old camp meeting and revival hymns. She goes to camp meeting every summer, but she does bewail their worldliness. Now I am going to leave you to your own devices a little while," and she bowed herself gracefully out of the room.

Their devices were school matters, around to which they soon veered. Helen had some questions to ask and she found Miss Parker preserved a golden mean where she fancied she would be rather pessimistic. She spoke of some of the promotions, of the girls who were slow in several things.



"I suppose you haven't tutored any?" she ventured.

"Not as a business. There were some girls depending on it. But you always find some one to help out of the Slough of Despond."

"I can see that it would be a good practice. Teaching is so different from the theory of it that you are sometimes at your wit's end. The theory doesn't take in the dull and obstinate pupils."

"You do not look as if you were easily made nervous," said Mr. Underwood. "That is a great thing."

"Nerves were not cultivated," laughed Helen. "You see fresh air and brisk exercise outside of the gymnasium were strongly insisted upon. The statistics are compared at the close of every semester to see if any girl has fallen back physically. They generally improve. There is so much going on all the time between work and play. You get heartily tired. I have missed my walks this week. Of course there will be some games——" rather hesitatingly.

"What should you advise?"



"There ought to be a tennis court—and—basketball."

"Some of the girls play tennis. About half a mile away are the golf links and baseball grounds. But the boys and the grown people occupy them. There are matches played. We have quite a fine team here. Oh, you will find we are not behind in everything," Miss Parker answered with some spirit.

"We will have to talk to Mr. Hildreth about a tennis court for the girls," said Mr. Underwood. "I am a believer in athletics when it is not carried too far and does not interfere with lessons. For the chief end of school days *is* education, fitting boys and girls to take up the real work of life."

"And then we put in a lot of non-essentials," Miss Parker said, with some asperity.

"*We* will try to discriminate."

"There might be a botany class while pleasant weather lasts," Helen proposed.

"That will take us out of doors."

"A good thing if you can find time. You must get all the assistance out of Miss Jaynes



that you can. We cannot be a college quite yet, however."

Helen listened to some plans with much attention. Then Mrs. Underwood returned and brought out a book of fine photographs they had collected in their summer journeying.

"For we spend all vacation in trips here and there. So we have no beautiful garden to display, June roses and honeysuckle in profusion, and a tulip bed in the front yard. Consequently we do not mourn over what is left behind."

Helen had visited some of the places, and they could talk them over. Miss Parker generally went to a quiet seaside resort, where she bathed and slept, and came back with the consciousness that she had made no inroads in her savings. Something about her suggested Miss Carr. And when Helen had heard her story a while later, she could not help sympathizing inwardly with the hard life. Would any one dare offer it outwardly, she wondered?

"I am so glad you asked me to come," Helen said to her hostess. "I think your housekeeping is charming. I've had a delight-



ful day—it has been almost a day,” smiling a little. “And I hope to be friends with Miss Parker, and win your good esteem as well.”

“I think you will please husband, though you are very young for the place. If three big boys were out of it, there would be clear sailing. Come in when you can. It seems as if you might get rather lonesome at Mrs. Stirling’s, but you will soon make friends about. I think you are rather of that kind.”

“I like people. I am interested in their lives, their aims, their joys and sorrows. I couldn’t ever live alone.”

“Oh, you’ll be married some day, and it’s best for any woman, though husband thinks the single women are of great service to the world. So are the mothers. The children make the school possible, you see. Come in any time, you will not bore me for you can talk,” nodding and laughing.

Mr. Underwood’s good-by was pleasant. “We will meet on Monday, but not at Philippi, though there may be some battles,” he said rather mirthfully.

Helen did not go directly home, but wan-



dered through the street of stores. In one of the confectioneries she saw some schoolgirls regaling themselves with cream. It almost gave her a homesick pang.

Here was a stationery and book store. She went in and bought some magazines. Then she sauntered through a dry-goods store. Oh, there was the library, also!

Mrs. Vail studied her a moment. "Oh, isn't it Miss Grant, the new high school teacher? I remember you were here several weeks ago. I hope you will come in often. Mr. Hildreth has just made us such a nice donation of reference books and a new encyclopedia. He wishes me to keep a list of books called for. He is so interested in the school."

Helen looked the list over and found them excellent. But the sun was making long shadows and it would soon be supper time. It had been a very entertaining day. Would it do to trust Mrs. Underwood, she wondered? She certainly was bright and amusing. Miss Parker's good-by had been very formal. Well, she was not in a hurry to decide upon friends.



## CHAPTER V

### A SKIRMISH ALONG THE LINE

By the end of the second week Helen had gauged her school work and quite correctly. If it were only next year and she had them regulated to her liking, she thought.

She felt the three oldest boys, who had spent the two years in other high schools, were likely to make trouble. Not in any overt fashion. They could look the very picture of innocence. Eastman had a way of saying veiled insolent things, of half correcting some of her methods by a comparison with his other years' experiences. Two or three points were referred to Mr. Underwood.

"Miss Grant is right. That method has been discarded. I really wonder at any one teaching it now," he commented quietly, and the assured tone settled the boy.

The younger children she found more



thorough, more tractable, better disciplined under Miss Parker's training. Many of them were really eager to pursue the new path. Miss Jaynes was proving herself very efficient.

If there was a ringleader among the boys there was also a head among the girls, and this turned mostly upon social position. One was the daughter of the first physician in the town, the other the daughter of the justice, Judge Ford, who lived in very handsome style. They snubbed some of the less prominent girls; they were quite indifferent to perfect recitations. Miss Ford was decidedly poor in higher algebra.

"Do you know anything in particular about the Eastmans?" Miss Grant asked of Mrs. Stirling one evening. "What is their home influence? I have heard Mr. Eastman spoken of very highly."

"Mr. Eastman is a fine man, rather easy it is thought; Mrs. Eastman is very proud of her son and very indulgent. He has everything he wants and plenty of money to spend. People think it will be the ruin of him. There is a whisper that he came near being expelled at



Ridgewood. I'm truly sorry you have to undertake him. I am averse to gossip, but it may be better for you to know it."

"Yes. Thank you," Helen returned. She wondered a little that Mr. Underwood had not admitted this.

One morning he had been particularly remiss in several things. His Latin translation was bad to a degree.

"You will remain this afternoon and go over this," she said with quiet authority. "You have not had one thoroughly good exercise since you have been here."

"Your methods are different," he replied rather shortly. "I don't seem to get into them."

"You remember what Mr. Underwood said."

"One can't get changed about in a minute," rather crossly, shrugging his shoulders.

She gave him back the exercise.

He did not come in the afternoon.

"Last week he did the same thing and brought no excuse. I asked him for it two days in succession, but I quite resolved I



should not do it again since this is the rule. And his Latin grows worse. His geometry is like a beginner's," she said to the principal.

"He certainly does know better. They have good training at Ridgewood."

"I should like to put him back with the fourth grade."

"There would be a fight," Mr. Underwood laughed.

"Do his parents or the teachers rule the school?"

"Are you prepared for a fight?"

"I think I am prepared to do what is right, to uphold the authority of the school."

Helen glanced at him fearlessly, and he approved of her. What a fine, clear-headed girl she was.

"Of course you know I stand back of you in the matter of rules," he replied decisively.

Dick Eastman took his place the next morning with the assurance of perfect right. Miss Grant summoned him after the morning exercises were ended.

"How did you come to disobey yesterday?" she asked in a quiet tone.



"Why—the new automobile came up and mother wanted to go out and try it. Then it is a little different from the other and she thought Briggs had better give me a lesson," he answered nonchalantly.

"Did she send an excuse?"

"Miss Grant, can't you take my word?" with an assumption of injury.

"I can't afford to transgress the rules, neither can you. I have let it pass once. Then you were to stay and re-write your exercise. It was a wretched affair. Where is it?"

He seemed to be thinking, but there was a lurking sense of amusement hovering about his lips.

"I don't know. I must have left it at home."

"Why did you not do it in the evening then?"

"Oh, we had company. Mother wanted me."

"You will go home for that and the excuse."

"I'll get it at noon. Honor bright, I will."



“Did you hear what I said?” glancing steadily at him.

“ Well, it won’t do any good, mother will be out all the morning. The auto’s just a beauty. I’ll get it at noon.”

"Richard Eastman, you will go with me to Mr. Underwood's office."

“But Miss Grant——” not making the slightest movement.

He had said to the boys—"She will find out she can't boss me. I'm not going to give in to a girl like that." And he felt that Larry Dinsmore was watching the contest out of the sides of his eyes.

She left the room. He stood irresolute. Would he dare defy her and go to his seat?

She met Mr. Underwood, who was coming to the room, and made a brief explanation. Just as they entered Eastman had turned and taken a few steps.

“Richard Eastman, I wish to see you in my office,” said Mr. Underwood.

Wilful defiance would mean expulsion. He was not quite ready for that.

"Miss Grant, will you come also?"



The older scholars glanced questioninglly at each other.

"He'll flunk," whispered Larry. "He was a fool to carry it quite so far."

Miss Grant told her story.

"Is this correct?" asked Mr. Underwood.

Dick shuffled and picked at a button on his coat.

"Answer, yes or no. Is Miss Grant's complaint strictly true?"

"Well, I would have brought the note this noon," he answered shortly.

"That doesn't answer my question."

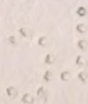
"Yes," he mumbled sullenly.

"You have been disobedient, impertinent to Miss Grant, defiant. You will beg her pardon."

The tone was clear, decisive. Dick Eastman knew it of old.

"I didn't think it would make any difference. I'm sure I did not mean to——" hesitating.

"You *did* mean to disobey her as well as the rules of the school. This is not your first offense. Do you mean to obey now?"





"I beg your pardon, Miss Grant."

The tone did not ring true.

"You may leave us now, Miss Grant. Will you please send in the exercise book?"

Helen acknowledged the apology with a very slight inclination of the head, and returned to her room. Some of the boys seemed on the alert a few moments, then everything went on as usual. Eastman did not return, neither was he out at recess.

"He carried that a little too far," declared Larry. "My, but she *was* spunky! It takes the still ones to carry weight. But she had to fall back on Underwood."

"Well, he is the principal," said another. "I think Dick is rather too lordly. Suppose she wouldn't let him form the club?"

"He's not much at ball-playing, anyhow."

"Well, he might be umpire."

There was a general laugh at that.

When Dick Eastman entered the room at noon he laid his excuse on Miss Grant's desk, also a fairly well-written exercise. He was rather indifferent but made no further trouble.

"You'll see," he announced to the boys.



"I'll be even with her yet. If I'd carried this out father would have bundled me off to some academy or other, and I'd rather stay here where we just have everything. The new auto's grand. I'm going to learn to run it. And I'll stay home when it suits me."

Mr. Eastman had threatened his son with this for some escapades at Ridgewood. His mother had begged him off two years before. "He is so young to be sent away," she pleaded. "At Ridgewood he can come home on Friday, and we shall have him under our own supervision the two days."

Dick had given in rather than have his father know about the affair.

"It's very silly of the young woman to make such a fuss over a note. College is right for boys and men, but it spoils women, and sets them up to thinking their authority is quite as good as a man's. It isn't. And they say she is so young! Well, don't run up against the conceit of the person 'drest in a little brief authority,'" and Mrs. Eastman laughed.

"Ought I to thank you for coming to my assistance so promptly?" Helen asked of Mr.



Underwood, but her eyes had a mirthful gleam in them.

He was gaining daily respect for his new teacher. She quite understood what she was about and carried herself with admirable dignity. He really felt amazed at her mathematical ability.

"That is my one talent," she explained, when he spoke of it one day. "As people say—it comes natural, and is no trouble, never confuses me. All the rest I had to study for, almost fight for some things. Then I do think real solid study stamps matters on your brain, helps your memory."

"I did my duty and you did yours," Mr. Underwood answered, "or rather yours came first. I wish we did not have Eastman. He likes to set himself up against authority. We had several tussles when he was in the grammar school. He needs a strong hand, and his mother is silly over him. He ought to be sent to some good military school, but his mother is too much opposed at present, though if he had not come to terms I should have prodded his father up to this step. He could be a good



scholar with a little energy, but he will not make the effort. And he has a way of setting up the others. He likes to rule a little coterie and he used to delight in mischief. But I thought maybe the two years' training had done something for him. However, I do not mean to stand any nonsense. He shall not rouse a spirit of insubordination. So you must keep a good watch and let me know at once."

"There is another thing. Will you look over the month's record?"

She brought her book, and finding Eastman's page placed it before him.

"That is disgraceful! Is there any other as bad?"

"Carl Benson's is only a little better. Larry Dinsmore is in the same set but he has more pride, I think. Of course these records are sent to the parents at the end of the month?"

"That is our regulation. Benson has no father and is living with a married sister. He has considerable money, too, and that ruins a good many boys. I believe he has quite a



sensible guardian, though. If next month is no better I shall complain to him. We cannot afford to have our school drop down and get a poor name."

"There are some very good scholars, and now that they know what is expected of them they are attentive and studious."

"Then you are not discouraged?" in a half-teasing tone, lifting his brows.

"Discouraged!" She stood up straight before him, her eyes shining with energy.

"You will do. I was a little afraid at first, I waited to be asked in some matters, but you seldom do that. Either you are of a high order, or the training is of a high order."

She flushed. "Give the training a good deal of the credit," she made answer smilingly.

"There must have been some foundation," he returned. "I'm truly sorry about this low record, but the truth must be told."

"Think what that Millard lad has done. He will make a fine linguist. He is really a splendid student. A school of such pupils would make one vain."



"Would it? I think I should enjoy it. But so many really have no ambition. It seems as if they study simply to get through the hours with as little effort as possible. How to make children think is the great endeavor."

"But if you *can* interest them——"

"And often, when you think you have their attention, you find they have been following out some of their dream thoughts."

"That sounds like Miss Parker," and Helen half smiled.

"Miss Parker is a kind of mystery to me, grows more so as the years go on. I suppose those are the most successful who teach from true election. She doesn't really love it. She had some romance at first, we all do, though the opportunity came to her. I can't imagine her being anything else. She wouldn't have the taste nor the patience for a dressmaker, she wouldn't make an attractive clerk, nor an artist, nor a writer of any sort. She is a fine teacher. There is a good deal said about being in sympathy with your scholars. How can a person be in sympathy with thirty or forty different natures? Am I talking heresy? She



believes in good hard study. She drills and drills. That's the old system, but it still turns out good scholars."

"But you cannot acquire anything worth while without study. Some branches have more interest than others, and it is more difficult for some children to acquire or to remember. Why do we not pay more attention to memory cultivation?"

"Miss Grant, hit upon some scheme and you will make your fortune. I have tried several of the systems and found them wanting. Miss Parker says drill and drill, make a child do the thing you tell him to at once, and only tell one thing at a time. Of course there are heart-burnings among the mothers when the children are not promoted. She turned six children back to Miss Yates's class two weeks ago; there were four irate mothers, two sensible ones. One threatened to put her girl in a private school and Miss Parker advised her to. But I noticed she didn't. I like the half-yearly system of promotion. You may get a relay when it comes."

"I have liked the promoted children the



best," and the smile gave her eyes an expression of commendation that pleased him very much. "Will you repeat that to Miss Parker? I think every one ought to reap some reward for his or her earnest endeavors."

"Thank you. I wish before the year is out you may be real good friends, though I can't promise much for her. She leads an inwardly lonely life, if you can understand that. She goes out some, to church regularly; occasionally my wife drags her to some place of amusement. There is a curious sort of friendliness between them. Laura likes people who puzzle her and she is always trying to loose the Gordian knot. Others she takes up and drops when it suits her, when she has squeezed them dry. The worst with Miss Parker is that you do not seem to get anywhere with her, you have to wait until the spirit moves her. But she is a first-class teacher. I am glad she dislikes changes, otherwise I should be in constant fear of losing her. Well, have we been all round Robin Hood's barn? But do not think we have settled Dick Eastman."

And indeed Helen found the old foe with a



new face. Richard had taken his report to his mother.

"There's spite work for you!" he exclaimed angrily. "I just hate the sight of that Miss Grant! There wasn't one of the boys marked like that."

"Oh, Dick! What will your father say!" and she looked really troubled.

"Can't you sign it, momsey? Then he needn't know about it."

"But he always insists upon seeing them. And you know how really angry he was about that Ridgewood matter. I had to beg for you to be kept here. Would you rather—go elsewhere?" hesitatingly.

"No, I wouldn't! Go away from you?" and he kissed her with fervor. "Then, I'm going to be captain of the baseball team. Jerry Stout is going away to business. And I'll just fight this matter out. Gad! If I dared to alter two or three of those figures!"

"Oh, Dick! You wouldn't do that!" she cried in an alarmed tone.

"Well, I'd be found out. No, I wouldn't



run my head into such a noose," he returned rather sullenly.

"Oh, Dick, do be careful! Do you think there could be any mistake?"

"Why, she marked me low on the books. When a fellow knows the teacher has a spite against him——"

"I think I can fix this for you," his mother said thoughtfully.

"Don't see Woody about it. You see he has to uphold Miss Grant."

"When she is in the wrong? And it is disrespectful to call such nicknames, Richard. Suppose some day you should use it to him?"

"Oh, half the boys say it. They used to when I was in school before."

"Please don't do it. It isn't gentlemanly or proper."

Richard asked his father to play checkers with him in the evening and really was very amiable. They were to take a spin in the auto Saturday afternoon. In the morning he went to the small clubhouse where the boys were in the habit of meeting, and was elected captain of the team, much to his delight.



Meanwhile Mrs. Eastman made her way up to Mrs. Stirling's, with whom she exchanged ceremonious calls two or three times a year. Lilian Firth had just dusted the parlor and opened the hall door.

"I wish to see Miss Grant," said the lady in a decidedly peremptory tone.

Lilian was rather dazed by the elegant vision.

"There's some one to see you, Miss Grant, just splendidly dressed in a cream cloth gown and white gloves. And two such beautiful lavender feathers in her hat, and diamond earrings."

"Did she send up her name or card?" interrupted Helen. Saturday morning was a rather unusual time for calls. She was devoting it to writing letters. She slipped on a white shirtwaist and gave her hair a few pats, and went down wondering.

An elegant person truly. Her gown was in the latest style, its trimming extremely rich, and her lace boa had tiny tufts of lavender ostrich tips nestled through its fluffiness. The long hat feathers drooped on her shoulder; her



gloves fitted to perfection. A small diamond sunburst was at her throat and a very fine solitaire sparkled in each ear.

Helen stood a moment uncertain while the visitor glanced her over.

"I am Mrs. Eastman," the lady said in a mellifluous tone. "I came to have a little talk with you about my son."

Helen seated herself in a dignified manner, summoning her self-reliance for the attack she knew was imminent.

"Miss Grant, he has been very unhappy and much misunderstood the past month. No scholar can do his best work under such circumstances. At the Ridgewood school his rating was much higher. Do you not think there may have been some mistake or misunderstanding?"

"There was no mistake certainly. The record has been kept day by day and passed over to Mr. Underwood. I have only followed his rules. I am under his supervision as well as the scholars. And being a stranger, I have consulted him in any emergency."

"Perhaps some allowance should be made





"I WISH TO SEE MISS GRANT." — *Page 111.*







for him. You see, Miss Grant, a teacher's first duty is to get into sympathy with her pupils, to study their natures, to learn their capabilities, to assist them in their studies. Their minds are immature, they are easily won, and perhaps too easily prejudiced by unkindness, severity. When you win a child's love and trust half the battle is gained. Have you been trying to do this?"

Her manner was almost tragic and she clasped her hands to emphasize it.

"I would not call your son a child. He is among the oldest pupils," Helen returned calmly. "He has had two years' training in most of the branches he is at now. I own I was somewhat surprised at his lack of studious habits. Then he has been out a number of times."

"He has a feeling that—that you are not in sympathy with him; in short, that you have rather taken a dislike to him. He does not feel free to consult you in any difficulty."

"Mrs. Eastman, there should be no difficulty. The standard was not of my making. It is the same as that of other high schools in



the County or the State. At present it has not come up to Mr. Underwood's plans, even. A teacher who lowers it would not be able to keep her position."

"I'm not talking about standards," showing a little irritation in the voice that had been freighted with a kind of sweet assurance. "It is the sympathy, the inspiration the teacher gives, the incentive and the courage that speaks in the tone of the voice, the glance of the eye, the sort of magic a true teacher has that leads her pupils through difficult paths and brings out their best qualities. Of course you have had no experience in teaching, and I suppose you do not understand how important this is."

"What is it you desire me to do?" Helen asked.

The question so forcibly put nonplused Mrs. Eastman. Her eyes wandered about the room, she tugged at one glove, she made an attempt to speak, then glanced imploringly.

"Couldn't you give him another chance, go over some of these defective lessons with him, and show him that you truly care for his improvement? And then, couldn't his rating



be set up higher? I am sure it would be a kindly thing, and really no more than one's duty when it comes to that. I am sure there would be no trouble if you would take a little pains to find the way to his heart."

"Mrs. Eastman, think a moment. The lessons and exercises are given out. There is plenty of time to study them. Would it be right for a teacher to spend all her time over one pupil to the detriment of the others? Might not their parents justly complain? Let me give you one instance. After one wretched translation Mr. Underwood kept him in the office until he went over it, and he did it very decently without any assistance. He has both covertly and openly set himself against the authority of the school, not any regulation that I have made. Nothing can be done to change the record of this month. Next month it rests with him. You had better see Mr. Underwood and discuss the matter."

"I always said a man should have the care of growing boys. A woman can't understand them. She is generally full of her own fads and fancies and tries every one on a Procrus-



tean bed, blaming them if they do not meet its requirements. I hoped to find a very different person, Miss Grant, but I suppose you are so full of your own college ideas. You will have to change a great deal before you become a successful teacher," and now her face was flushed with anger.

Helen rose with refined dignity. Mrs. Eastman sprang up also.

"Allow me to wish you good-morning," she said, and now her suavity was gone, her voice fairly shook with temper.

"Good-morning," Helen returned, bowing her out.

Then she ran upstairs and flung herself into the cozy willow rocker. She had half a mind to cry—and then she laughed hysterically. What could be Mrs. Eastman's ideas of discipline?

Then she decided she would see Mr. Underwood. Would the irate lady go directly there? Well, she would plan not to meet her.

She found Mrs. Underwood in the garden.

"Don't ask me for any," holding up her scissors in a formidable fashion. "These are



for religious purposes. And we are going away to spend Sunday. Isn't it a glorious day?"

"Where is Mr. Underwood?"

"In his little den making his will, I think. I believe he makes a new one before every railroad journey. Run in. I'll be there presently."

"Have you had a visitor?" Helen asked, after the first greeting.

"A visitor? No. Is there any one anxious to see me? We are to be off inside of an hour."

"I've just had one. It annoyed and amused me. May I tell it over?"

He nodded. When she mentioned Mrs. Eastman's name he gave a whistle.

"She is a silly, ill-judging woman. Does she think a teacher can spend all her life over one pupil? And to have the record changed! She will ruin the boy unless his father interferes. No, Miss Grant, she will not come to me; she knows better. She wants her son at home. She is fond of him. He is a rather good-looking attendant and he is smart enough



to wheedle anything out of her. Well, perhaps I had better look after some of them a little more closely, or savagely—which?”

Helen laughed, “Mr. Underwood, I believe I do not like boys.”

There was something so naïve about the face that he laughed, too.

“How about Millard and Harry White? Didn’t they find parting sweet sorrow yesterday afternoon?”

She turned scarlet.

“Did you never know any big boys?”

“Yes, one who was splendid. We sat on the porch steps of a delightful old country house, and he taught me Greek. I hated it, but I had to learn it. My father compelled me to.”

“Was your father a teacher?”

“He was at first, at Hope, where he married my mother. But he went to the East to dig among ruins, then was in the British Museum deciphering them.”

“And the big boy?”

She did not flush then, but glanced out of clear, tranquil eyes,



“He married a dear friend of mine last summer. She was in college two years in the freshman class. A dainty, pretty thing, who could write charming verses. They are an ideal couple.”

She wasn't at all in love with him, Mr. Underwood ruminated. Men are quite as keen at scenting love passages as women.

“We will make a little change on Monday, I think. I'll consider it. But you may rest assured that Mrs. Eastman will not apply to me.”

“Thank you for all your kindness.”

Mrs. Underwood was packing her flowers in a basket and gave her a gay adieu. But Helen felt glad she had gone. She really began to like Mr. Underwood.

Was it a month since she had commenced the new life? It appeared both short and long. So many events had occurred and yet it seemed not more than a fortnight since she had entered the schoolroom. She had meant to do so many things. Yet she had been out only once with the botany class. Two or three girls were painting from nature. Some of the



younger boys were interested. The gymnasium was not a favorite with the girls. Tennis did very well, but basketball they knew nothing about. She recalled the fact that some of the college girls only went to the "Gym" when they were compelled.

She had gone to tea at the Millards' and had a most enjoyable time. They were only in middling circumstances, but there was a great deal of simple prettiness about the house. Ruth, the small girl, fell quite in love with her and said:

"Oh, Miss Grant! I want to be in the high school now. Allen talks so much about you. It's two more classes and then Miss Parker's. I'm awfully afraid of her. The girls say she's so strict. And she has such a way of looking right through you."

"No girl who is studious and obedient need be afraid of her," was the reply.

"But you have such a sweet smile. I don't believe Miss Parker ever smiles."

Helen wished she knew how. It was a shame to have so much real goodness covered up by the severe demeanor.



Helen played and sang for the children. The piano was old and it had never been very much, but she managed to evoke some melody.

"You have given the children such a lovely treat," Mrs. Millard said. "I wish you might come often."

"I believe I shall when I want a real good time," she answered cordially.

Another thing that had pleased her was the call of the Misses Gould, the eldest and the youngest. It was on Saturday afternoon. Miss Gould had donned her best black silk; she had three in different stages. Miss Hetty had a blue one with small brocaded figures. They looked just a little out of date, and carried it off with a sort of picturesque individuality.

Lilian had invited them into the parlor. Helen liked the sitting-room much better. The shutters were open, there was no sun to shine in the afternoon, but a bed of yellow marigolds of all tints and sizes stretched up enough to be seen from the windows.

"We try to give new neighbors a friendly welcome," began Miss Gould. "And we



thought we'd like to know you. It's something to have come fresh from a college that we used to think was just for men alone. But that was a long while ago. You look fresh and rosy, as if you hadn't burned much midnight oil, but I suppose it was all gas there. I think gas a great invention, it saves a lot of work. I was mortally afraid of it at first, but there isn't as much danger as with kerosene. I'm not so set against inventions if I have lived three-quarters of a century."

She was well preserved and her snowy hair was abundant, with just a little waviness. She had never spared herself about work though she did not look at all worn, and was straight and vigorous, with a most cheerful demeanor.

"How do you like Westfield, Miss Grant, and the school that really is imposing enough for a church? And where do you go to church?"

Helen said her leanings had alway been toward the Episcopal.

"Yes, Eliza said she saw you there. People think it's queer that we all go to different



churches. But it was this way. Mother was 'Piscopal, father Presbyterian. And they agreed when they had children that the boys should go with their father and the girls with their mother. Well, I was born and father said, 'Wife, the Lord's on your side this time.' Then, when Eliza was born, mother couldn't go out and father took me to church with him. I believe I always went to sleep, but he didn't mind. Eliza went with mother, and when Hetty was big enough she went first with one and then with the other. There never was any disputing, but I think father wished there had been one boy. I know mother did. We were happy as we could be. Then mother died, and father just wasted away year by year and then went to join her. It took us a good while to get over it and I suppose we did get a little queer, reading books and thinking over things by ourselves."

"And you have two Episcopalians?" Helen asked with kindly interest.

Hetty started as if she had been suddenly galvanized. Helen had begun to wonder if she was not going to say anything.



"Oh! I'm a Methodist. I hadn't joined either place when I went to a camp meeting, and that's thirty years ago. I was clear carried away with the singing and praying, and I just kept at it until I was converted. The old-fashioned ones have most dropped out, and I'm sorry for it, but there's camp meeting every summer and you get grace enough to take you over. People think it's queer we can't agree to go to one church, but there's no disagreeing in the case."

"And didn't the Saviour say—'In my Father's house are many mansions'? I never could see why people should quarrel and fight over the best thing in the world when there's plenty to go round," said Miss Mary.

"Why, sometimes we have quite experience meetings at home," said Miss Hetty in a jubilant sort of tone. "There's three sermons to talk over. There's sick people to hear about and do good to. There's so much in the world, and books and papers to read. Why, we really wouldn't have any time for disputing. As for everybody thinking alike and wanting the same



thing—wouldn't it make a queer, narrow world?"

She laughed gleefully, like a child. She was quite pretty, Helen thought, noticeably smaller than her sister, and she had very dainty hands,—she was carrying one glove.

They asked if she found any time for reading. The library was quite an institution. They wouldn't know how to do without it now. Strange how soon one got used to improvements! Miss Eliza did a great deal of beautiful needlework. They would be so glad to have her see it. Wouldn't she surely come to tea some time? They had some odd china cups and saucers that were great-great-grandmother's, a queer blue, and full of funny figures. Then there were grandmother's and mother's, and a set of knives and forks made of a deer's antlers, that grandfather killed. They sometimes said they had enough to start a museum. Maybe Miss Grant would like to see the old things.

Helen declared enthusiastically that she just should.

"We'll have a nice tea-drinking then, a good



old-fashioned time. Would you like Mr. Underwood and his wife? And Mrs. Stirling?"

This lady had said to Helen—"Don't call me until just at the last. The call is principally to you, and they will like it better."

Helen summoned her now and they had a little chat, when the ladies said they must go.

"Now come before real cold weather. We have some splendid dahlias and artemisias in almost every color. I can't endure to hear people call them 'mums.' Next week, perhaps. You set the day and let us know."

Helen promised and they said very proper adieus.

"What do they do with company if each keeps house separately?" asked Helen in a mirthful tone.

"Oh, they have it in the regular dining-room and all come together. They are good cooks, too. They are not as queer as you might think and are the best neighbors in the town; the happiest people, too."

"So to be friends we need not agree in everything," Helen said in a soft, reverent tone.



That evening she sat in the brilliant moonlight as it flooded the room. Ah! it would be worth a good deal to be back there at college, she and Leslie talking and half-listening to the patter of steps up and down the corridor, the half-smothered laughs. Did girls and women get cloistered fancies during those years of study and friendships? She would like to teach there, she thought. Perhaps next year, when Leslie was married, she might apply.

But was that the sole purpose of her four years' training? Was it not that she should be better fitted to wield an influence in some other sphere? To deal with the ever-increasing problems of the little world right about her, wherever her lines might be cast? "Oh, let me take them up bravely!" she cried from her inmost heart.



## CHAPTER VI

### BETTER DAYS

SUNDAY was a day of days to Helen Grant. A peerless October day with a golden glory all about, shimmering in the air like translucent waves, tinting the ripening leaves. An almost spring softness prevailed but the fragrance was not that of new growth, it was the richness of a summer harvest. There had been no frost as yet and the gardens were still abloom with gorgeous colors. It was inspiration to breathe the fragrant air.

The church service had a deep significance to her. "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do." That presupposed a certain looking, not for the mere gratification of the senses, but the things that came in one's way, the everyday duties, the little demands that might even bother and oppress. No evadings, no shuffling, no weak excuses, no longing for pleasant fields of the past.



She wondered a little as she wended her way to the school. Some of the younger scholars overtook her with joyous greetings. There was a cluster of boys in their own court talking earnestly. What would this month's record show? Any improvement?

She found a great bowl of flowers on her desk and gave a winsome smile about the room, hoping it might meet the donor. A note lay there, too. "I will attend to the first recitations this morning." There was no need of initials even, she knew the hand, and her heart gave a quick throb of relief. Not that she felt unable to cope with whatever might come, though she did not quite like the furtive look in Eastman's eyes, and the exchange of glances with the other boys.

Richard Eastman was very angry with Miss Grant. He would be amiable, but the three had settled to perplex her with some questions, pretending not to understand.

"The class in Latin and physics," she called.

They wended their way to the recitation room. Four girls and ten of the older boys.



The next form was so far behind that she preferred to have them by themselves.

They entered the room with meaning smiles that fell to gravity. For there at the table sat Mr. Underwood, who nodded politely as they filed in.

The fun was suddenly quenched. Each scholar tried his or her best, and some did well.

"Eastman, your exercise is simply atrocious. You and Lang and Dinsmore will remain in after school and rewrite. I shall no longer excuse this slipshod work. You have been here long enough to understand the requirements."

The boys flushed at being publicly reprimanded. So in physics they tried their best and needed no explanation. There was excellent order all the morning.

"Dang it!" exclaimed Lang at recess. "A fellow had no chance to ask a single explanation. Do you suppose she complained to Woody? After all, what's the good of this skirmishing if he is going to take a hand in it?"



"You can't get her out," exclaimed Dinsmore. "And I was going over the river this afternoon."

Eastman was angry all the way through. He had gone to a ball game Saturday afternoon, and found a new and exciting book in the library that he was reading by odd spells on Sunday. It was almost bedtime. Mr. Eastman wound the French clock, sauntered about the room, then said—

"It's near bedtime."

"I've almost finished this book," and Mrs. Eastman held up the few remaining pages. "And it isn't worth reading."

"Why do you take up such trash? Dick, is yours of the same sort?" his father asked.

"Oh, mine is a rousing good story," without glancing up.

"Dick!" suddenly—"did you bring home your report on Friday?"

Richard was tempted to lie, but his mother had seen it and sometimes she made a fuss about such things. She would have excused him now, but he did not know that.

"Yes," rather impatiently.



"Get it and let me sign it. I suppose you made a pretty good showing? It is said that Miss Grant is fine."

"Oh, she's good enough for kids," disdainfully

"Get the report. I may go off to-morrow morning without signing it."

That was what the boy had hoped. Then his mother would have done it.

"I don't—know. It's in your room, mother."

"Why do you want to fuss about it now, James? I really don't know what I did with it. Wait until to-morrow," said Mrs. Eastman rather pettishly.

"I want to see how the boy stands under the new régime."

"You can't tell much about it. Everything is so different. Classes are changed——"

"Well—get it," rather peremptorily.

"Mother, what did you do with it?"

"Really I don't know. I would have to go over the things myself, and I hate to have you messing them up. I'll have it in the morning."



Mr. Eastman went upstairs. There was a little sewing-room off the sleeping apartment where the machine stood, his wife's writing desk, and a bamboo case of books. The desk lay open. He tumbled the things about and turned up the report. As he looked it over a flash of anger lighted his eyes. No wonder they did not want him to see it! And the boy's mother could connive at this.

He went down with it in his hand. He was not often ruffled in temper, Mrs. Eastman had a way of smoothing over infelicities and covering them up.

"I do not wonder you were ashamed of it!" he exclaimed indignantly. "Dick, was that the best you could do?"

"Everything is so different, marks and all. And before we knew the regulations—and there has been so much confusion that a fellow didn't know where he stood."

"But—deportment even! A great fellow like you! And a woman! Why, the thing is abominable!"

Richard flushed crimson.

"You have never had anything like it."



"Well, I said things were so different."

"After your two years at Ridgewood you ought to know better than that, unless the standard is unusually high. I have heard that Mr. Underwood means to make it the finest school in the county."

"He will have to get a new teacher then," Mrs. Eastman said, in a sarcastic tone.

"Well, if Richard doesn't come up to her requisitions they must be pretty high," sarcastically.

"There may be such a thing as teaching over the heads of pupils. I've heard that ministers sometimes preach that way," and she laughed mockingly.

"Richard, understand me. I shall not be begged off. Another report like this will send you away to some school where the training will be sharp, rigorous. I'll have a talk with Mr. Underwood some evening. Now shut up your book and go to bed."

He shut it with an angry slam, went over to the bookshelves, but did not put it in.

"Good-night," he mumbled.



"The boy is getting beyond control," Mr. Eastman said decisively.

"I can manage him well enough. Boys of that age can be led by affection, but seldom driven. And that Miss Grant doesn't take any pains to study a boy's idiosyncrasies——"

"Boys didn't have any in my time. They were made to toe the mark. But the deportment was shameful. That couldn't have been Miss Grant's fault. I'll have a talk with Mr. Underwood. Are you going to sit up all night?"

"Go to bed and get in a good humor. There, dear, I suppose you were tried, so was I." She clasped her arms about her husband's neck. "I do think Dick will be better next month. I've had him out in the auto a good deal. It is just splendid! And the weather was so warm I should have thought school confinement would have driven the children crazy. We grown people suffered."

She always disarmed him by some show of sweetness.

The class was ready with its exercises the next day. Miss Grant was in charge and they



paid her due respect. In the afternoon she was surprised by a call from Mr. Hildreth. He had been away for a fortnight attending an educational meeting, and brought home with him two men visitors.

“Are you well settled with Mrs. Stirling?” he inquired. “And how about the school? It seems a shame to be confined indoors this magnificent autumn weather. I was wondering if I couldn’t send you and some of the children out for a drive. My man is very careful. You could take five or six girls if they wouldn’t mind a little crowding. We can put three seats in the surrey. There’s a place called North Bend, where the river almost doubles on itself, and some curious rocks, forming a cave. May be there would be something to study. I thought of having a cabinet put up in some room for specimens. I’ve studied a bit of geology in my day and have seen several theories exploded as well. Dame Nature doesn’t betray her secrets easily.”

“That would be most kind of you. We have taken some walks about and began a



winter fernery. There are so many things I would like to do."

"Such as what?" in a tone of fervent interest.

Helen flushed. "I expect I shall shock some of the mothers. Even in my post-graduate year, when I was a young lady," laughing, "I ran races just for the exercise, and the suppleness of limb, and the outdoor air. I've tried to start basketball. There's quite a nice baseball club in the grammar school, two of them indeed. But the boys in our wing can't seem to agree. They belong to some outside clubs. There ought to be a pleasure ground for the girls. I'm afraid I shall make too many demands. But we seem so restricted after all my larger liberty."

"The matter must be considered. About the ride? Will you go on Saturday?"

"Yes. But oh dear! How shall I choose my compatriots without heart-burning?" and she gave a perplexed smile.

"As a special reward. How will that do?"

"That must be the way, I think."



"Have you heard from our friends, the Yarrows?"

"You knew about the little daughter?" He nodded. "Mrs. Yarrow wrote when it was three weeks old. It is the best, dearest, loveliest thing in the world," and Helen gave a sweet, satisfactory laugh good to hear. "So the higher education doesn't seem to spoil mother love in every case," glancing up with arch merriment.

"It's the lack of true womanly education, I think. I am very glad it is a little daughter."

"Why?" with an eager light in her eyes.

"A man may be proud of his son, but he always feels that presently the son will go his own way; that in most cases, even in early youth, athletics and the football scores are more to him than any home interest. And he wants a child to love, to love him. The girl finds her way to his heart. He has to find his way to the boy's heart, and it is apt to be like his pockets—half or more filled with rubbish. When a man marries late in life it is generally because his inmost soul longs for womankind."



Helen was silent and the bronze lashes quivered in little shadows on her cheeks. She was deeply touched by his tone, more than the words.

"I wish we were high enough in the intellectual scale to have some people like the Yarrows, to have *them* in fact. I'd like to see Westfield a sort of center for intelligence, such as you find in some of the Eastern towns. Perhaps it will come," with a vague smile and a far-away look. "Do you think me a foolish old dreamer?"

"I could wish it myself," she returned longingly.

"There are some very nice, refined people, but they are of the old conservative sort. Much of the new is crude, some of it distasteful. It takes a good while to get toned down. You know Dr. Holmes said, to make a gentleman one must begin with the grandfather. Miss Grant, did you ever give a talk to an audience that was not schoolgirls? I know you had some fine debates in college."

She flushed and half smiled, remembering her talk before the Ladies' Club at Hope.



"No," she made answer. "I have not attempted to distinguish myself in that line."

"You could do it very well, I am sure. Now and then we have some first-class speaker or novelist, or a concert, but I would like to bring out the home talent and have talks that appeal to the town we live in. I had it planned out last winter, but there was so much discussion about the high school that I did not undertake it. Mr. Underwood is a very good speaker. The clergy might say a word that wasn't a sermon. And some of you women."

"Why, I think it would be a good plan. Oh, Mr. Hildreth! If you could get Miss Mary Gould to talk of life and education here in Westfield fifty years ago, when she was a young woman!"

"Miss Gould! Why, that would be capital! But," smiling, "we have wandered away from the text. Do you feel inclined to accept my offer and take out some of your girls as a reward of merit?"

"Indeed I do. I thought I had accepted it," with a charming uplift in her eyes. "Are



there any ferns in the place you spoke of? We have not found many thus far."

"Oh, yes. There is some rather marshy ground where wild things of all sorts grow. And the cardinal flower, though that is past and gone."

"Oh! I wish I had known it, I would have made a pilgrimage," she cried eagerly. "Is it near any point where we drove that day?"

"Oh, no. Confess you were a little home-sick just then."

There was a sound of merriment in his tone.

"I will admit it was quite a pronounced case. Not for the home merely, but a sort of homelikeness, if you can understand. And now come and inspect the beginnings of our fernery."

It was quite a large oblong box, standing where it took the light of the window, but not the sun.

"I wanted all small plants so the children could see them grow. Of course we could buy some, but I thought it more interesting to hunt them up on their native soil."

"And get some that have shed their summer



garments. In the warmth of the room they will soon sprout again. I like to see them unroll their gray, downy heads. I think I will have to send a few flowers that will bloom, to set in the windows. Would you like it?"

"Oh, very much."

"And Saturday—will that suit?"

"Yes. Thank you ever so much for the pleasure."

"Now I must go and visit Mr. Underwood. Have them all meet at Mrs. Stirling's. At two, the days are beginning to shorten."

Then he bowed himself out. Helen picked up some papers, put her desk in order, rolled up the exercises she was going to take home to read over. Miss Jaynes was standing on the steps of the main building, talking to one of the grammar teachers. Helen beckoned to her.

"I've had such a delightful plan proposed to me, and I accepted it just at the moment without considering the pros or cons. And now I am in trouble. Some one must help me out."

"I shall be very glad to if I can," and the



listener's eyes brightened. She was older than Miss Grant and had taught several years, but the college dignity of Helen kept her a trifle in awe.

Helen detailed the plan with eager interest, putting it on the ground of a search for ferns.

"Why, that is—just splendid! One wants to be girlish now and then over a very good thing. What is the difficulty?"

"Oh, will you go? The surrey seats are quite broad, three can sit on them, part being rather slim girls. I thought of the smaller children. Most of the larger girls come from the well-to-do-classes whose parents have carriages and autos, or ride wheels. It would be a treat to the younger ones, and, do you know, I think they evince more interest in the fernery."

"Oh, they certainly do. The airs of some of the larger ones make me smile. I wish they could be in a freshman class at college for the first year and get quizzed," laughing. "But how to make a choice? You really can judge better than I."



Helen studied her confrère intently, approvingly.

"It ought to be as a sort of reward," continued Miss Jaynes.

"Yes, I think so."

"Miss Grant, it is a good thing they can't try for it. Not that I disapprove of such measures. There are two girls who nearly always have perfect records. Lois Vail is one, Edna March another. You do not know the Vails?"

"No. I was somehow attracted by the name. It is rather uncommon. There is another child in the grammar school. Mr. Underwood thinks she will be promoted in February. They are fine students."

"I wish you would go with me sometime and call on them. Their mother is worth knowing."

"You interest me. I haven't meant to be exclusive, but there have been so many things——"

"Yes. You see I knew these two in the grammar school. There are three more, but one is a baby."



"Are they well-to-do? That is a Westfield provincialism."

Miss Jaynes laughed. "A kind of country gauging," she returned. "No. The father is some sort of overseer in the cloth mill. They have a pretty cottage with a large garden. How Mrs. Vail finds time to do so much and take care of the babies passes me. She keeps them all tidy and she is sensible enough to dress them plainly."

"I suppose she is a superior woman?"

"In one sense of the word. I once heard her say she had very little chance for education, but she meant that her children should have. She is by no means ignorant and talks well, correctly. They have an interesting plan. She puts her baby to sleep early. Then at the table the children talk of what they have learned during the day. There is no hurrying to get the dishes washed. Afterward the children study their lessons for the next day and talk them over at breakfast. Lois always has perfect recitations and is a well-mannered girl, more truly polite than many of the richer ones."



"Why, they must be worth seeing. I *should* call her a superior woman. And now—we can take six children, I think, if we agree to crowd a little."

"You are very good to include me."

"Most of the children will be from your department. Perhaps that will be better—it will stir up no jealousy."

"Edna March and Sadie Corwin. I am afraid I shall have to look over my register for the others. You are sure six will not crowd too much?"

"We can put two on the seat with the driver. Oh, a little squeeze will not hurt. In fact it looks very much like a picnic to me. Do you know about North Bend?"

"Oh, yes. It is very pretty. The wind in the river makes a pond where there is safe skating in the winter. It's a funny river, up above here. There is a channel a mile or so farther up, then it gets lost in obscurity. At Pleasantdale, some five or six miles above here, it widens out again and is fed by several creeks. It is really beautiful in the spring and



in the autumn after the rains. You have not been about much?" tentatively.

"Mr. Winslow took me for an automobile ride. Mrs. Winslow thinks it the perfection of traveling. Perhaps I should on a five-thousand-mile journey. I was tied up in a veil, which I can't endure, but I saw the benefit of it. We went like the wind and you had to gasp for breath. All about was a blur. I might like a more moderate pace. Next spring I think I shall hire a comfortable nag who will not disdain wayside grass, and go really sight-seeing."

"Let me share the expense now and then," she besought.

Helen nodded. "When shall we give the invitations?" she asked.

"Not until Friday noon. Otherwise we may be besieged."

"But that seems such a short notice. Some of their mothers may not consent."

"Oh, they will. If not, we can pick up a stray somewhere," Miss Jaynes said gayly. "You see it would have a tendency to distract Friday's attention."



That was true enough.

They were each going different ways. Helen sauntered slowly along when Mr. Underwood overtook her.

"So you have been offered a sort of excursion," he commented, laughing with a tint of mischief in his eyes.

"Miss Jaynes and I are to take some of the children up to North Bend for ferns. Mr. Hildreth is to send his big surrey," she replied in a most ordinary tone. "Some of the best scholars are to be thus rewarded."

"He has a new crochet in his head. Not exactly that," in a more serious tone. "I do believe it would be a rather good thing. We had a parents' association last winter, but it didn't amount to much. They can go through the worst storm to a card party, but anything of real value—I do wish parents took more interest in these early years of their children. You can teach, but you can't murder the queen's English and *learn* for them, though some people think you might. Eastman begins to improve. His father came to see me and wondered if we had the right person in the



right place, as the head of the school. Look me in the face and you will see what I said."

They both laughed.

"You are a very good friend," she subjoined, with deep feeling.

"That fellow ought to be sent away to a regular boys' school. However, if he makes trouble he will find a short shrift. Dinsmore is doing better."

"Why do not the boys have a ball club for the sake of the *esprit de corps*?"

"I thought they were to."

"I believe the younger ones would have done so, but the notable players were in an outside club."

"I don't quite like that, but I did not want to seem arbitrary on the start, since we were a rather puny folk."

"I think of appointing a debate. If I could get the girls up to the point."

"The days of chromos have gone by," he returned with a funny inflection. "We might offer a prize of a gold watch for the best argument well rendered. Or a football suit well padded. My people are doing wondrous well.



They want to enter the high school in February."

"I shall be glad to have them, on the principle that a large family of children entertain each other and are less trouble. A crowd is stimulating."

"Thank you for looking at it so cheerfully."

"I've been used to large numbers. They can get up a wider interest. They rub off the sharp corners. They find one person doesn't know it all, and that in many things there is more than one way. I change my mind about matters, methods. What is life for but to broaden you out?"

"If you didn't have to get narrowed in again."

"Well, sometimes you do take up too much room and you find that out, too."

"Alas, mortifying fact!"

"Shrunk goods give more satisfaction."

"Did Mr. Hildreth put you down for one of the talkers?" he inquired.

"Oh, I sincerely hope not!"

It was Mr. Underwood's turn to laugh then.



"We will have to talk it over. Come down some evening. Mrs. Underwood thinks you neglect her because her schooldays are passed."

Helen turned up her street with a gay nod.



## CHAPTER VII

### OCTOBER AND HALLOWE'EN

THE children had all gathered in the sitting-room at Mrs. Stirling's before the surrey came. Not one sent an excuse. And children they really were, from twelve to almost fourteen. Daisy Bingham was the oldest and the smallest, but she had a bright little brown face and soft brown eyes, while her hair was light, a curious combination. She sighed for the purple-black hair one of her favorite story-book heroines had, but her mother comforted her by telling her nearly all light hair turned darker as people grew older.

They squeezed Miss Grant's hand with their soft fingers and nearly every one said—"Oh, it was just splendid in you to ask us, and we'll have a lovely time, I know we will!"

There was some sameness in it, but then they



had fixed it up together, which accounted for it.

Then the surrey came and they were bundled in. Two were delighted to sit on the front seat with Martin. Miss Grant had two with her and Miss Jaynes the other two. The beautiful bays nodded their heads and looked out of eyes that almost laughed as they started off.

It was a magnificent October day, warmer than it had been. There were still some wood asters in bloom, and the wild clematis was snowy with the "Aaron's beard." "Bread and butter" was full of glossy round leaves, but most of the shrubbery was bare except where the Virginia creeper was trailing over it. Elms and maples had mostly shed their leaves, but the hickories were a blaze of yellow and the oaks a coppery brown. Now and then a chestnut showed yellowish brown burs but there had not been frost enough to burst them.

The road wound in and out—it was not much traveled nowadays since a straighter one had been cut. In some places there were levels where you could look over great fields,



where the shocks of yellow corn were standing, or meadows of a second growth where cattle grazed. Then some piles of rocks shut out the view. On the other side was mostly undergrowth. You saw the river, then it disappeared to come in sight again. The road made a curve, but there was a rustic bridge over the river. It was quite a detour, then it suddenly ran back again.

"It's like Tennyson's brook," said Miss Grant.

"Oh!" rejoined the girl on the front seat, "my sister plays and sings that. 'I go on forever, ever,' " she hummed.

"Mother thought Tennyson was too old for us, that it ought to be saved a while yet, all except the May Queen. And we always feel so sorry she had to die," and Lois Vail drew up closer to Helen. "But oh, we do like Eugene Field and Riley so much! After we get the lessons done in the evening and father has finished his paper he reads to us."

"And you are fond of poetry?"

"Oh, it just seems to fill all my heart," and the child sighed. "I like the things that al-



most make you cry. Little girls don't ever write verses, do they?"

"Not very often."

"Belle Gordon writes lovely verses, but it is mostly when babies die."

Miss Gordon was a sentimental girl who had already been quite a trial to Miss Grant.

"Now, if you want ferns," Martin halted. "Most of the ground is dry now, we're almost suffering for rain. Do you all want to get out?"

Indeed they did, with their two baskets and trowels. They laughed and stretched their limbs and indulged in joyous exclamations.

"Why, it's almost an island!" declared Edna March. "If there was only a tent!"

It was, indeed, a lovely green island, covered with odd feathery grasses and some brown cat-tails, and shaded by the tall trees about. "A regular fairy spot," said Miss Jaynes.

"Oh! couldn't we go over?" cried several voices.

"You'd get wet feet if you did. But it is a mighty pretty spot to look at," said Martin.



"And there are a few marshmallows," espied Miss Jaynes.

"Oh! they look like great silk roses, don't they?" exclaimed Edna. "Aren't they lovely!"

"I think I can manage them," said Martin.

He found a forked stick and drew them over, but alas! the lovely pink leaves fell off. There was a general exclamation of grief.

" 'They have had their day and ceased to be.' "

"Miss Grant, that sounds like poetry," said Lois.

"It is—Tennyson."

"I shall be glad to read so many things when I am older. Mother says you spoil them by reading them when you can't understand anything but the flowing sound."

Miss Jaynes looked at her companion. Surely the mother must have a poet's soul herself, thought Helen, and could not endure having things mangled.

"Do you know the cardinal flower?" asked Martin. "There's quite a lot growing round here. Headache plant, country folks call it."



"Lobelia. Yes, a preparation of it was used for headache," said Helen. "I believe I would have haunted this place if I had known of it earlier. How wonderfully beautiful it is! A regular fairy dell."

"I like fairy stories so much," said Sadie Corwin plaintively. "What if they ain't true!"

"Ain't?" laughed Miss Jaynes.

"Are not, then," rather pettishly. "Aunt Patty, who lives with us, says it is just as good."

"It isn't right, so it can't be just as good. And you a high-school girl!"

The child pouted a moment, then smiled.

They rambled about, gathered some berries from the stalks of Jack-in-the-pulpit, and then began a search for the ferns—the baby ones, Lois said. They found some of the old fronds full of brown dots on the under side.

"Aren't they queer!" exclaimed two or three at the same moment.

"They are the seeds," explained Helen.

"Would they really grow?"

"Oh, yes."



"I mean to take some home and see."

"Plant them as soon as you can. Here, take these dried leaves. We have our baskets full; more than we shall need, I think."

"I mean to have a fern bed," said Edna March. "And what is this great branchy fern—is it really one?"

"That is sweet fern, used in some medicines."

"Sweet fern tea is a great thing with some people," appended Martin. "And you had better come out now and sit in the sun a bit to dry out the dampness."

They followed his advice. Then Helen brought out a paper bag of cookies that Mrs. Stirling had insisted upon her taking, and the girls hailed them with delight.

"Some one ought to tell a story."

"Lois, you relate a composition about a fern, where he or she lived year after year and then was transplanted. Do it in the first person. 'I was a tiny baby fern covered with pinkish gray fur when I poked my head out of the ground——'"

"Oh, isn't that funny! I do believe I



could," and she went on with an eagerness that was almost inspiration.

"I guess you young people better be getting back in the surrey," advised Martin.

"Indeed it is full time."

"And we can't hear the other stories," lugubriously.

"You can take them for compositions next week."

It did seem as if the sun was in a great hurry to get to the other side of the world and wake up the Chinese, Sadie said. But it left such a magnificent trail behind in all gorgeous tints. When that began to fade there came curious long streaks in the lavender gray.

"It's drawing wind. There'll be a change in the weather. And I shouldn't wonder if we had rain," announced Martin.

The children were taken to their several homes, full of delight and wishing it could be over again.

"Please tell Mr. Hildreth it was a perfect success and he made a number of people very happy," Helen Grant said to Martin. "I shall write him a note of thanks."



He had been sitting in his library all the afternoon, reading a little, thinking a good deal, and half envying Martin with the merry group and the chatter. Yes, years ago he should have begun to fill the place with children. They would be growing up now. One tall, fine girl the eldest, who would be a charming companion. They would drive and ride about the country's ways, they would sit here in the library and read to each other, talk over poets and plays, compare the book heroes they liked best. By her choice he would have an insight into a cultivated, well-trained, broad-minded girl's heart. They would travel and he would find new delights, looking through the fresh, sweet eyes of youth.

Oh, yes, he had missed a good deal by an unlucky turn of fate. It was too late to begin now.

The ideally perfect autumn came to a sudden end. Sunday was cloudy and cold, a gray day with a sort of sullen wind that seemed to be looking for all the weak places in the summer's worn armor. Helen went to church. How people grumbled, as if it was hardly a



fair thing after the serene weather. The roasted chicken and the sweet potatoes went to Helen's heart. Mrs. Stirling had a cheerful wood fire kindled in the sitting-room, and the pine cones and hemlock branches gave out a penetrating fragrance.

She read a while afterward, then she wrote some letters. It seemed to bring the friends so near. Shirley was still enthusiastically happy, and Mrs. Bell's content was so sweet a thing it brought tender tears to Helen's eyes. And Juliet was so happy and busy. The girls wrote every week, but they thought the happiest time of all would be when they had graduated and come home for good. "And I think of the pleasure we shall have. I hope their father, in some mysterious manner, can see their joy. It gladdens my life so much," Juliet wrote, and Helen knew how sweet a smile irradiated her face. Baby was the sweetest and most affectionate little thing. "I don't see how she can be so sweet and good, a weed growing in the slums, but there might have been some virtues back of her. I thank God every day that he placed me where I



could save her, and I pity the poor woman whose husband had not enough faith in God to allow her to rescue 'one of these little ones.' What if I had had a husband who objected!"

Helen smiled a little over that.

Then there was Mrs. Yarrow's enthusiasm, and the professor's joy. "It is the loveliest and grandest thing of all my life. I thought I had made him happy before, but this exquisite satisfaction is quite indescribable. I think he looks on all girls with tenderer eyes, but I hope he will not be too indulgent. You can't think how much we want you to come to see our happy household."

How alike the real and the assumed motherhood was! Only in Juliet's life there was no third person to share the blessing.

The storm came on fiercely now and the wind blew in long sweeps and with a roar, like some unhappy monster striving to escape. Mrs. Stirling always took a nap on Sunday afternoon; she never called it a siesta. It grew darker. Helen put up her portfolio and drew a rocking-chair nearer the fire just for



sociability. Lilian sat on the other side. It seemed as if she looked rather despondent.

Helen wondered a little if she had been quite as friendly as was her duty. They had not assimilated in any great degree. Helen's training had made her sufficient for herself and she hardly realized the paucity of this girl's resources, although it seemed as if she must have gained considerable experience.

Lilian Firth was disappointed in her new life. The town where she had lived was small enough for everybody to know each other. There were no really rich people to hold aloof. Young people had flocked together. There were church sociables, a singing school, picnics in the summer and skating in the winter, beside small parties at each other's houses with old time games and much merriment, if of a rather crude sort. And the girl who "kept company" was really envied among her compeers.

James Firth had not cordially approved of the young fellow who worked out on a farm, as did most of the young men who did not have farms of their own or who did not go



away. James said he had no "push" to him. Lilian's money was good enough where it was; he was paying her interest for it now. But she was thinking and planning for a home of her own, and many things seemed possible to her inexperience. She meant to be married when vacation came.

Of course it was a great blow to her. Then the certainty that she would not have the school another year, though in her first disappointment she was ready to fly to the ends of the earth. A jilted girl, and to see her rival's happiness every Sunday at least! It was her brother's fault. If their marriage had been planned and the time set, this could not have happened.

So at first she was glad to accept her aunt's offer. She had no thought but that she should step at once right among other girls and have so good a time that she would soon forget. But her aunt's visitors were mostly middle-aged. She had gone in the Bible class, but the girls seemed of such a different order that she did not feel at home. And at school the big girls were too young for her; if she could have



taught the smaller ones, she would have been happier.

Here was Miss Grant, bright, vigorous, good-looking, a ready talker, and yet in these six weeks not a young man had called on her. A few married people had been in, Mr. Hildreth had spent one evening. Didn't she mean to have some admirers?

"What is it, Lilian? I wonder if you are homesick?"

The tone was sweet, sympathetic, but the listener's lip drooped a little.

"This is better than at my brother's in some things. If I could have kept the school——"

"I wish you were real interested in study. What do you like the most?"

"I don't know. It seems as if a good deal of it wouldn't be of much use."

"You will make a good mathematician."

"I don't see any good in trigonometry, and logic. Then the history of those dead and gone people that we don't care anything about. Of course we want to know about our own country."

"And many people want to know about the



others. Think of China, thousands of years old, and the great Tamerlane who swept across Asia and meant to conquer it all! No one really knows when its curious civilization began. And its great philosopher Confucius, who iterated a part of the Golden Rule. And Egypt's culture and advance long before Abraham's time. Why, I think it very fascinating to go back to the beginning of things if we can find them."

Helen paused suddenly. There was a time when she rebelled against them she remembered. But if they had been made interesting!

"Those old people have been dead and gone these many hundred years," in a tone of discontent. "I like my own life better, but I don't know how to make it suit me. I wish I did."

Helen wished that she had wisdom enough to inspire such girls as these. Teachers must get discouraged with the slow progress, and just keep to their plain duty like Miss Parker. So many of the college teachers were enthusiasts.

The log broke in two and scattered a shower



of beautiful sparks. Lilian brought the ends together and put on another. That darkened the room. How the wind racketed outside and occasionally flung itself against the house as if it meant to demolish it. But the builder's art was stronger than nature in this case. How secure one felt! This was among the things men had learned, to conquer nature. There were ships on the great ocean that were "carried up to heaven and down again to the great deep," yet they came safely through the storm.

"Miss Grant," said the rather perturbed voice, "don't you ever mean to marry?"

Helen could have laughed at the incongruous change of thought demanded by the question.

"I don't know what I mean to do in that respect. There are so many things I want to do first."

"But do you not think women are better off, happier?"

So this was what the poor girl's mind was running on. She recalled an incident at college, a girl whose lover had proved recreant and who went down to the depths of despair,



and for a while was the dread and vexation of teachers. Lilian did not unload her disappointment on any one, but it was sapping away her mental strength nevertheless. What could be done for the girl? Was the high school the best place for her? Was teaching in a half-hearted manner a real benefit to the pupil, a fair thing all around?

"You see teachers do not marry as a general thing. That Miss Jaynes is very nice but she hasn't any company. And Miss Parker is old——"

"No, I think we ought not call a woman of that age old. If she should live to be seventy she would only be in the middle part of her life. And since youth is so attractive we ought to stay there as long as possible and be willing to have our neighbors linger in the enchanted land."

"But you can't stay young. The years will go on," in a despairing sort of tone.

"One of the youngest old people I have seen is Miss Hetty Gould. She is rosy and bright and cheerful, and when she came in to visit the school a few days ago I was surprised at her



intelligence. Their father, it seems, taught them all Latin, an unusual thing in those days. I do believe now she could construe equal to any boy we have. She is going over the Odes and Satires of Horace now, and she knows a good deal about the other Latin poets. Then, only a few years ago, that Mr. Wheeler, whose sons keep the clock and jewelry store, asked her to marry him, and he was seven years younger."

"And she didn't take him!" in surprise.

"No." Helen laughed softly. "Mrs. Underwood told me, and she said he took it very hard."

"But—why?" For it seemed to Lilian a woman must want to marry.

"She had a nice home. And she said 'she could not think of breaking up the trio, they were so happy and comfortable together.' A year or two after he married a widow and did not make a wise choice, it seems. But I do believe in love and marriage when it is suitable."

Mrs. Stirling came down just then and they could hear Jane preparing supper.

"What a terrible storm it is! I am afraid



it will cause no end of destruction. And cold, too! Let us give thanks that we are housed and warm," she exclaimed.

Helen echoed that heartily.

After supper she read aloud from "In Memoriam," and thought of Daisy Bell and also Elizabeth Carr, whom she had soothed with the tender melody.

"Were they really friends?" asked Lilian, deeply moved.

"Very, very dear friends," answered Helen softly.

"I didn't know men could love each other so well, or that poetry was so truly beautiful. I've never cared much about it."

"We are going to take up some of the poets as a study. And you ought to learn to read them well, you have a good voice."

It still rained the next morning. Martin came over. Mr. Hildreth wanted to know if he, Martin, could not take the ferns down for Miss Grant.

"Why, that would be most kind of you. Yes, whenever you are at liberty. Thank you very much."



There was a pretty fair attendance in spite of the rain. At recess, as they could not go out, they gathered about Miss Grant, and the girls who had taken the ride talked it over in an eager fashion.

"Suppose you write it for an exercise this afternoon," she said. "One girl can describe the ride there and back, another the river with the almost island, then gathering the ferns. At noon we will set them out and that will make another. Miss Jaynes must think up the last."

"One girl ought to write a letter of thanks to Mr. Hildreth," she replied.

"That is excellent," declared Helen.

They ate their lunch at noon and then proceeded to place the ferns in their new home.

"Oh, who has some scissors?" cried Edna March. "See this long—is it a root? I can't break it. And look what is growing on the end!"

Helen turned. "Oh, don't cut it! Why, that is quite a prize. This little sort of sprout on the end is a new fern, a baby, though it has



gone a long way from its mother. It is called a traveling fern. It sends out this wiry sort of shoot that presently touches the ground and takes root and a new fern grows."

"Can we make it grow here?"

"I think so. We will try."

"And here is an old root,"—doubtfully, holding it up in her hand.

"We are going to bury that and see if the warmth will not make it think it is spring, and it may poke up its gray, fuzzy head. Perhaps we can't deceive it, though," and she laughed.

"Well, we will try. Oh, won't it be funny!"

"Florists are doing this all the time. They make lilies of the valley blossom at Christmas, and many other summer flowers."

They had more than enough to fill their box, and Mr. Underwood sent them a large flat pot that had come last year with some Easter tulips.

The compositions on their outing were so well done that Miss Grant sent them in to Mr. Underwood, who commended them warmly.



And Mr. Hildreth came in to see the fern bed and express his pleasure that they had enjoyed it so much.

The next grand adventure was chestnutting. Most of the school turned out for that, except some of the older girls who did not want to be in such a rabble. Mr. Underwood went to thrash the trees, he said, since he was not allowed to thrash any boys.

They had a grand time and a great deal of fun. Early autumn, and warm weather was over. The gardens were despoiled of all blooms except the chrysanthemums. The trees were well-nigh leafless, only here and there an oak or a copper beech stood out defiantly. How beautiful the slim white birches looked! There were still a few field asters and here and there a belated daisy. Great clumps of golden-rod were growing fuzzy.

They gathered a good supply of chestnuts. There had been no tramps to despoil the woods. They sang songs and then ran races, the boys against the girls.

"Did you ever run races when you were little?" inquired Allen Millard wistfully,



watching the flying children. He had come to be a very warm admirer of Miss Grant.

"Oh, yes. And when I was big, too, at college. We had a course and there was a prize for that and other athletic feats," and Helen laughed at the thought of the old times.

"Did you ever win a prize?"

Helen flushed. "The freshmen run against the sophomores, then they against the juniors, and so on. There is a great time. Yes, I won twice."

"Oh, I wish I could have seen you!" and he drew a long breath. "I want to go to college, Miss Grant, but I shall never be able to do any of those things, and you can't think——" His voice broke.

"Yes, I can, for I have been in it myself. There is so much friendly rivalry, so much that stirs the blood and the very soul. I am sorry to have you handicapped, but I should go all the same."

"I like you so much," in a low tone. "Won't you come to tea some night and tell us all about it?"



Helen promised.

There was a great deal of fun in the racing. The boys beat, of course, but Helen said the girls had no regular training and did not know how to manage their strength. It was a very good-natured contest.

"I've been almost made over into a boy," Mr. Underwood declared. "I don't know when I have enjoyed such a frolic. I wish my wife had come, Miss Grant, you rouse one's enthusiasm. And to-day you look just sixteen. But you manage admirably. The boys have improved in their studies. May be by the end of the year we may be not quite discouraged," laughingly.

In certain ways they had improved; recitations and exercises were better, but there was still a sort of covert insolence on the part of Eastman and occasionally the others. Helen did not notice it. Miss Jaynes said, "It is such a pleasure to teach with you! Oh, I hope nothing will take you away for years!"

Helen's eyes were bright with pleasure.

"Oh, Miss Grant!" one of the girls said Friday afternoon when school had closed,



“do you know any Hallowe’en tricks? The boys are going to have a procession, and it will be queer enough! I have been making some cotton doughnuts and some salt caramels. I wanted to have a real party but mother said they would be too uproarious, and I could have it later on.”

They talked over various charms and Helen told of some that were simple, yet amusing. Mr. Underwood cautioned the boys about committing willful mischief, as that would be punished.

Mrs. Stirling closed her old-fashioned board shutters. “I do not suppose they will come up as far as here,” she said, “but it is well enough to be prepared.”

They heard the horns and the clang of tin pans now and then, and for a long while all was silent. Then there seemed stealthy steps, but they died away.

After a little while, a light ring at the doorbell. Jane was going to bed, and with a candlestick in her hand she paused to open the door and give the intruder a piece of her mind. But her little space was pushed so rudely open



that the door struck her, and something fell heavily to the floor.

Jane screamed with affright. Mrs. Stirling came out in the hall. There lay a figure of a boy or man, with blood spattered here and there on his clothing. A hand lay by itself, frightfully white.

"Oh, Jane! are you hurt? What is it? What dreadful thing——"

"My face has had a pretty bad bang." She kicked the form viciously. "Why, it's—it's—" with another and harder kick—"a log—dressed up. And that's no real hand. Drat them boys! I'd like to horsewhip them!"

The girls had come out. It was a log having a false face and a long coat wrapped around it, with small patches of red flannel pinned here and there to simulate blood. The hand was made of cotton cloth and stuffed, and a red gash on that.

"Let us drag it in," said Mrs. Stirling. "The police must be notified. Why, Jane, if it had struck you it would have knocked you down. As it is your cheek begins to swell and



your eye also. Why, if it had been your temple it might have killed you!"

They shut the door and barred it. Then they went back to the kitchen and bathed Jane's face with hot water and witch hazel.

"The door came so suddenly against me. I had meant to open it just a little crack. It was such a sort of lady-like ring I didn't suspect, and I thought it might be some one from the Cooks'."

Helen drew a long breath. "It was a cruel and dastardly thing, and the perpetrators ought to be severely punished." Was it meant as an insult or fright to her?

"I only hope we can discover them," said Mrs. Stirling. "And now let us all go to bed. The door will not be opened again to-night."

True to her word she sallied out early the next morning. An officer came to view the figure, which was as much as he could lift. He took off the wrappings and the mask and rolled them up, and dragged the log out of doors with instructions to let it lie there for a while.

Soon after there came a reporter for the



evening paper, and Mrs. Stirling in her indignation withheld no particulars. Jane's face was still swollen and her eye inflamed.

Mr. Hildreth came in presently.

"If there were a crowd of young people having a merry party here, one might understand the cowardly trick. But a small household of women! And such a dangerous thing! I shall make every effort to find the perpetrators, for there were several, no doubt."

The Stirling house was quite besieged through the day. The gates and signs that had been exchanged, the steps and fences marked up with red and blue chalk were quite thrown into the shade by this piece of mischief that might have had a fatal result. The whole town was indignant over the account in the evening paper. Mr. and Mrs. Underwood came up to offer their condolence.

"If any of the school boys are concerned in this they shall be made to suffer, Miss Grant." In a lower tone just for her ear, "Do you suspect any one?"

Helen colored. "Will not the coat betray the perpetrator?" she asked rather confusedly.



“The coat—I had not thought of that. All the things are at the precinct. I can’t quite understand——” He knit his brows and looked sharply at Helen. “No one can have a grudge against Mrs. Stirling. And her niece is a very quiet person. If she were a boy, now!”

Helen tried to keep down the rising color that she felt flooded her face, and leaned over to straighten the table-cover that had been pushed away.

“It was a dastardly act. I should be sorry to be the mother of a boy capable of such a thing.”

“I do not suppose he really meant serious harm. Boys are so thoughtless.”

“What is the good of all our training if we cannot make them think of the injury to their neighbors? And the churches, the Sunday schools?”

How fine and spirited her face looked in its indignation! Was it the training that had made her strong and clear-eyed, reticent, too? Any other person having suffered insolence from the speech of Dick Eastman would have accused him at a venture.



## CHAPTER VIII

### KEEPING A SECRET

MRS. STIRLING was quite exhausted on Sunday, from the talk and the excitement, and did not go to church. There were callers all the afternoon. Jane's discolored eye attested the extent of the injury, though it had been from the force with which the heavy door had been thrown open. She had come down to dinner and was now ensconced in the Morris chair with the cushions about her. Habitually pale, she had a wan and startled look.

One and another was relating grievances and defacements.

"Though it's not as bad as real paint. There was a grotesque figure on my nice newly-painted front door—with horns and a tail, and even if it was too new to touch I had it scrubbed off," complained a neighbor. "Now it will have to be done over. Mr. Kent has been driving the boys out of the apple



orchard,—we have a few very fine trees and we count on what they bring in to us. It is a shame to have your property destroyed and your crops ruined or stolen.”

“Some stringent measures must be taken to stop these depredations,” said Mr. Hildreth.

“I don’t know that I am altogether in favor of the high school,” continued the indignant Mrs. Kent. “We have had some rest from mischief these two years, while the large boys have been away, and now it has begun again.”

“What about the high school?” asked Mr. Underwood, who had just entered with his wife. “That is the apple of Mr. Hildreth’s eye, the idol of his heart,” and he laughed over to him. “Mrs. Stirling, I hope you are not suffering from the shock too severely. Nothing can exceed my regret that you should have been made the victim of such a cruel trick.”

“I had rather have the high school closed than turn out such miscreants,” Mr. Hildreth exclaimed indignantly.

“But why the high school? There are boys down in the paper mill, in the cloth mill as well. Some of them frequent the saloons,



and many of these mischiefs seem like half-drunken capers. I can't have our boys blamed for everything."

"But you see we had comparative peace last fall, and the mill boys were there. Most of them have been in the public school. You should have trained them better, Mr. Underwood."

That gentleman flushed with a spasm of anger, as he replied:

"You seem to forget that boys will be boys and that for a few years they are the very embodiment of mischief. But they turn out very fair men afterward."

"Well, I'm thankful I never had a boy!" declared Mrs. Kent.

"If all the mothers felt that way what would we do for husbands," laughed Mrs. Underwood.

"Why, I thought matters were going on very nicely with us. Miss Grant has noticed the improvement. It isn't fair to put all the blame on us. Miss Grant, take up the cudgels for us," and Mr. Underwood gave her a meaning look.



"I should be sorry to have any boy in the school connected with such a positively wicked scheme as this and several other pieces of mischief. But much of it comes back to the utter indifference to other people's belongings. I call it dishonesty to mar and destroy what it will cost the owner considerable money to replace. They had better steal his money; he would escape the trouble of repairing."

"Oh, Miss Grant! that's pretty hard! They do not really mean——"

"Why do they do it, then? They are not so ignorant of the consequences. Don't you suppose they all knew Mrs. Kent's hall door must be scrubbed off and painted over? And marking up fences and steps! We are teaching civics, interest in homes and grounds and towns. Why, then, excuse the marring and destruction of them? We see the wrong and crime in a tramp and send him to prison. It is just as wrong in any one's son and we ought to have the courage to say so."

Helen Grant looked lovely as she stood there in her brave spirit and fine, fearless honor.

"Miss Grant is right," said Mr. Hildreth.



"I do not think we emphasize the justice to our neighbor sufficiently. When our forefathers subscribed to 'the pursuit of happiness' they certainly did not mean we should wrong our neighbor to get it. And surely malicious mischief cannot make any one happy. It must be done in secret and kept secret. It is a thing to be ashamed of, to be regretted later on, if the boy has any manliness in him. I wish the perpetrators of this ferreted out."

"You may rest assured I shall do my best," said Mr. Underwood rather sharply.

Mrs. Underwood had seated herself beside Mrs. Stirling. "I do not believe I should have opened the door," she said.

"But Jane would have opened it in the morning and the log would have fallen in, perhaps knocked her down, as she would not have been so cautious. And it did look dreadful in the dim light, with those patches of red as if some one had been murdered."

Mrs. Stirling shuddered even now.

"I can't think who would have done it to you," was the indignant comment.

"The boys have never molested me before.



Now I have two young women and I fancy the trick was for them. But they had annoyed no one, nor made themselves obnoxious."

Had it been meant for Miss Grant? The two men had a rather warm discussion, supplemented by a certain straightforwardness in Mrs. Kent, who kept strictly to right and wrong.

"We are tiring out Mrs. Stirling," Mrs. Underwood said at length. "No words can adequately express our regret that you and Jane should have been such sufferers. And I am sure the whole town will be eager to punish the perpetrators."

Helen was quite certain she could guess at two of them, for one could not have done it alone. But she made no special reply to Lilian's wondering.

Monday morning the larger boys and those who had taken part in the procession were called into Mr. Underwood's office, when he dwelt upon the heinousness of the trick that might have done very serious injury.

"The procession and the real fun we can excuse, but it ought to be confined to you boys.



You have no right to injure and deface the property of grown people, and I give warning now that any boy guilty of the crime of a tramp will be handed over to the law to be dealt with. As for the other I cannot think any boy in this school could be so lost to honor, and a sense of what is due to every human being, as to willfully do so despicable an act. The authorities will use their utmost endeavors to ferret out the perpetrators, and if any are found in this school they will be ignominiously expelled. Now you may go to your classes."

Helen stood so that she could face the boys as they came in. All of them had rather flushed countenances. Dinsmore and Eastman evaded her glance. She wondered if she were quite right in concealing her suspicions. But the punishment would be very severe and the stigma remain for years.

Mr. Underwood tried to draw some suggestive remark from her, but she was on her guard. If she meant to keep the secret she must beware even of herself.

All that week the big boys seemed to have a dispensation of grace. Their recitations were



wonderful, they propounded no foolish questions, they were uniformly polite to her. But with her keen sense she felt there was a certain knowledge between her and Eastman. He flushed at any sudden glance instead of boldly staring.

There was a great stir about discovering the culprits. They had covered their tracks securely. They found that the coat belonged to a colored man who lived by himself and did odd jobs about. It had been given to him the winter before by the Methodist minister, and stolen early in the week. No possible suspicion could attach to him. So the matter remained a mystery.

"I should think it a drunken prank," said Judge Ford, "only I can't see any reason for playing it on a quiet, inoffensive woman."

Helen wondered about Thanksgiving. Shirley and Willard insisted she should come to them. There would be three visiting days, and she might make it four by an early return on Monday morning. And if Juliet would come down on Friday! She was hungry for a sight of the dear faces of the past life.



Mr. Hildreth always gave a Thanksgiving dinner to some of his neighbors who had no close family ties to claim them on that day.

“Oh, must you go?” he said to Helen with a wistful inflection. “I had quite counted on you. You see I am a selfish old fellow, liking my own pleasure. But you have been so long away from your friends. Will Miss Craven meet you? I should like to see her again.”

“She will come down on Friday. We plan to go to some nice entertainment—she will have the tickets. But I am to visit my charming little protégée, Mrs. Bell.”

“You might invite me to make their acquaintance and it would enlarge our repertory of mutual friends; then we could talk them over. And we might find something for Saturday.”

“Oh! Would you like it?” Her face was eager, smiling. “And Miss Craven would be delighted to see you. Then I should like you to meet the Bells, though you know so many grand people, and they are kind of everyday folk,—well, not that exactly, either. They are charming.”



"I can believe that easily," smiling in his turn.

"And I would like to come to your dinner, too. O dear! How many times I've wished I were two people! Isn't it queer that at times you would like to have a dual body? Would they both enjoy, I wonder?"

"The other parties would, I am quite sure," he returned gravely.

"About the visit, now," he began after a pause. "If I should come down on Friday where can I find you in the evening? You and Miss Craven," he added.

She gave him Mr. Bell's address.

"And about the school?" That was a safe subject of conversation, and he did enjoy seeing her talk as well as listening. "Does everything go on well?"

"Oh, the boys are so angelic and studious that I am afraid something will happen. Now it is the girls that give me a queer feeling. There are five or six of them banded together for some mysterious purpose. They are the oldest, perhaps the richest. They snub the others. They are quite condescending to me,



think of that!" and she laughed with charming gayety. "The other matter has never been cleared up," she ventured.

"No, really to my chagrin. I think Mr. Underwod suspected, but for valid reasons held his peace. Judge Ford was quite sure it was some of the river toughs. I wish the gang could be cleared out. But it seemed unlikely to me that they would torment a person they knew nothing about."

She was silent, and tried to keep her face from betraying color.

There were so many invitations for her that she said there were more than enough dinners to last the old year out. Some of the younger girls hung about her on Wednesday and made her promise over and over again that she would be sure to come back.

"Why, I have bargained to stay a whole year. That will take until June."

"And then next year, and the next—oh, until I am grown up and married."

"You must finish the course in four years."

"My cousin came home from boarding school and was married almost right away!"



"You must learn a good deal before that time," insisted Helen.

It amused her to see these children playing at sweethearts, "best girl," and "my beau," exchanging little gifts and having petty disputes, and sometimes getting each other's admirers away and not speaking for days.

The fernery was flourishing finely. They were studying up on plant life and finding many curiously interesting facts.

"After the Christmas vacation we will plant some flower seeds and see what we can do. And we might raise some geraniums slips."

"Oh, that will be just splendid!" exclaimed half a dozen voices. "Miss Grant, you make things so interesting."

That was what she desired to do. Why was she not as successful with the older ones?

But she drew a long, relieved breath on Wednesday when school was dismissed. She had sent her suit-case down to the station in the morning; she had only to change her dress, and the walk was not long. Her heart was light and joyous. She felt as if she was not



more than sixteen. Miss Firth said, "Good-by. How I shall miss you," in a melancholy manner.

Willard and Shirley were at the station to meet her, both rosy and happy.

"We have done nothing much but talk about you for the last three days. And it doesn't rain, and nothing has happened to you, and oh, I'm so glad."

Shirley almost danced with delight. How sort of gay and mysterious she was, with her tender, luminous eyes.

"And you do not look a bit worn out. Are the girls and boys nice?"

"The girls and boys are truly engaging. The older ones, aping young ladies and gentlemen, going to parties and having poor recitations the next morning, are not so admirable. I wish some of them could be in the freshman class just to get the grown-up airs knocked out of them, but oh! I'm afraid they will never reach there, though they are not planning to go. The Westfield mothers are not anxious on that score."

"I've had such a lovely letter from Leslie.



And Lorraine has a lover. We all go the same way," with her rippling laugh. "And of course you know Miss Craven is coming, but she has promised to be Mrs. Osborne's guest. And now we know the Travis family quite well. Beatrice is charming. And Jack! He declares he was in love with you long ago, and you never told us a word about it!"

Jack! Oh, that was the old summer at the seaside, and it brought up Gordon Danforth. What was he doing—studying? Somehow she felt hungry to hear from him.

"Oh, Jack was only a big boy."

"He's quite a nice young fellow; gone in a bank," said Willard.

"And he has a girl. I'm afraid you have lost your chance," declared Shirley mischievously.

"Then I must bear it heroically," in a tone of high resolve.

"And we want to hear about the Westfield lovers."

"There are none. The principal has a wife, I think I told you. Most of the men are mar-



ried. The rest are young, very young," laughing with a grimace. "I have met two bachelors. One is devoted to his mother and an aunt. It is said he has promised his mother not to marry while she lives, and she isn't sixty yet. So you see there would be no use of setting any young affections on him, though he is nice, and has the editorship of the *Evening Gazette*; is quite intelligent and thinks a good deal of his attainments."

"And the other?"

"Oh, that Mr. Hildreth. He has a fine home, and is a really superior man. It is said that he declined to be a candidate for mayor. But he is a very public-spirited citizen, and I've inveigled him into coming to see you and Willard, though I suspect the real attraction is Miss Craven."

"Oh, why didn't you attract him yourself?" cried Shirley.

"Well, he might be my father." She blushed as she said it.

"Oh, as old as that!" disappointedly.

"But he doesn't seem old," conscience-smitten that she should have suggested it.



"But you don't want to marry any old fellow," protested Willard. "I'll look up a nice lover for you."

"I'm engaged for a year—to the school. And I want to make a success of it. So no lovers until then."

They reached the house. Helen had not seen the real home. It was an apartment, two stories up, but there was an elevator. A very pleasantly arranged suite of rooms, pretty, but not too ornate. Mrs. Bell was delighted to see her.

"You will find some familiar faces," Willard began, "if furniture can be said to have faces. Any way, it appeals to your affection. This in my den. Here is father's desk and his old-fashioned bookcase, his easy-chair, and some of the pictures he cherished. It brings him back so tenderly. Somehow as time goes on you think more of those in the unseen. You can almost bring them back. And Daisy—we shall always wish she hadn't married as she did—but she and father are together. You see we haven't furnished very grandly. Shirley's mother wrote that she could have some



of their fine old things, but I'm afraid they won't do for a flat."

"I wouldn't let him be extravagant," laughed Shirley. "Mother thinks it best to begin moderately. When he gets to be a great lawyer and has thirty or forty thousand dollar fees, we may be grand."

She bent over and kissed Mrs. Bell fondly.

How happy they were. Yes, it was an ideal marriage.

Late that evening Shirley remarked, "We have stolen a march on you, Helen. We are going up to Marjorie's to-morrow. She gives the Thanksgiving dinner, Mrs. Towne the Christmas feast, and the family will all be together."

"Oh! why didn't you let me wait?" cried Helen.

"Why, you are one of us," replied Willard, catching her hand and pressing it warmly. "You came in Daisy's place, you know. We could not do without you."

"No, my dear, it would make too big a break," said the mother.

It was a pleasant day and they had a de-



lightful time at the Rectory. The Townes had a new baby; three for grandmother to love and pet, and Marjorie's little girl was very sweet. Helen told them about Miss Craven's lovely protégée.

"She is to adopt it legally as a niece and give it her own name, and it will have the best of training," said Helen. "It really was too beautiful to run the risk of an institution."

"A splendid work," rejoined Mr. Hollis, "worthy of every Christian admiration. One of these little ones saved from destruction and eternal death maybe. And when I see a woman in an elegant carriage with a dog sitting beside her, I wonder how she will answer to God for some perishing child she might have saved. For that is the true work we are set to do in this world. Will you thank her for me that she has seen her way clear to do it?"

"Indeed I will, gladly," returned the girl.

She wished Juliet could see this home, and this man, so courteous, yet so admirably in earnest, so imbued with high spiritual life, yet with no austerity. Would Leslie ever have



such a home? She thought she could answer for the husband.

It was a very happy reunion, and they returned with a true Thanksgiving uplift.

The next day, just before luncheon, Juliet joined them. Mr. Osborne had obtained their tickets for a Wagner opera, and there were three.

“Oh, how lovely of you!” declared Shirley. “It is a shame to leave you alone, mother, and go off on such a splendid time!”

“Oh, dear, my young days are over. You must listen for me,” returned Mrs. Bell.

The three were delighted. Helen had not heard this opera and reveled in the music, one thing she had missed sorely at Westfield. She had thought of hiring a piano, but so far she had found no leisure time.

Juliet had expected to return to her friends, but she was surprised by Helen's arrangements. Of course she could only consent.

Mr. Hildreth met with a cordial welcome and found Helen had not over-praised her friend Shirley. They talked of school matters and he admitted that it had been rather



hard for Helen, but that there was considerable improvement. Willard took a man's interest in the town, and Mr. Hildreth's very earnest plans for it as well as the characteristic people one found in such places.

"I don't know that I should have chosen it above all others to settle in but it came to me, and the old Hildreths had been among the early settlers. I had roamed about a good deal and the restfulness was very gratifying to me. It had certain points of beauty and now is quite enterprising. And I felt I must take a share in the real work of life, so why not here? When I get tired and a longing comes for outside pleasures, I hie me to some city and take my fill of delights, musical and intellectual. But truly, I did not consider how dull it might be for a young girl fresh from the real enjoyments of life."

"But it hasn't been dull," protested Helen. "I have been interested in my work and have found some new types of humanity. And I have had a few struggles with boys, who were rather an unknown quantity to me before."

"And she has succeeded admirably," de-



clared Mr. Hildreth with an appreciative smile.

"Oh, do not make me vain!" she pleaded mirthfully. "The worst may be yet to come. We had better wait until the close of the school year. I may be set aside as incapable."

"Hardly," said the gentleman.

"And about the queer people?" suggested Shirley. "I came from Virginia, an old-time settlement. Except being rather lonely I didn't see much to complain of. But after the delightful college life—and I was an awfully stupid student, it took me two years to get through the freshman class, and I was a pretty good Latin scholar when I entered. I know I should have been dropped but for Miss Grant's kindly assistance. And when I went home with my new experience and wider outlook people seemed so queer, quite benighted."

"We are not altogether benighted, are we, Miss Grant? Speak a good word for us," and there was a mirthful twinkle in his eye.

"Westfield isn't benighted at all. The clergy are of a high grade. We really have a nice li-



brary and quite a fine Athletic Club, I believe. I did not go to the match football that was played. But I have been out to tea and found some nice people. Will it be scandal if I talk about the Goulds?" and she raised her eyes to Mr. Hildreth with a merry light shining in them.

"I do not believe you could talk scandal."

"I wonder some one does not interview them and put them in a book. Think of three elderly women belonging to different persuasions, keeping house separately, having different ideas as to diet, yet never disputing. Intelligent, well-bred, as I suppose people were thirty or forty, oh, fifty years ago."

"Why, I never heard of such a thing!" and Mrs. Bell leaned over, all interest.

"It is all true. They are fine women. I wish there were more like them," declared Mr. Hildreth.

"They came to call on me. They are very punctilious. Then they invited Mrs. Stirling and myself to tea. And it was just lovely. It's a great spacious house, full of all manner of queer things, some beautiful, some ugly. We



were in the real dining-room. One sister was at either end of the table, one in the middle; that was Hetty, the youngest, who was just seventy. We were opposite her, and she poured our tea. She believes in all the good things of life. Miss Mary had her bread, some apples chopped fine for a salad, some potatoes treated the same way but cold, and sliced tomatoes—they have a mysterious way of keeping them up to Christmas; Miss Eliza had some sliced smoked salmon garnished with boiled egg, she never eats meat either; Miss Hetty had some delicious cold chicken, canned fruit, pot cheese that was a dream, it was so rich and toothsome; and cake galore. Miss Mary gave us some of her apple salad that had a bit of nutmeg that flavored it in a lovely fashion. And I tasted Miss Eliza's fish. No one commented on the other's taste, they simply said, 'I do so or so,' with the utmost sweetness, and the perfect right which is very attractive. Miss Mary uses her great grandmother's china, Miss Eliza her grandmother's, and Miss Hetty her mother's. There doesn't seem to be any friction."



"There is not," interposed Mr. Hildreth earnestly. "And I have known them for years. Then did Miss Mary play for you?"

"Oh, yes. One of the others said, 'Mary, you go and play for Miss Grant and we will wash up the dishes.' It is a thin-legged old-fashioned piano, but she made it yield a tender sweetness. Such beautiful hymns as she sang, many of them I had never heard before, but it seemed as if 'Praise the Lord' was in all of them. It was like the song of the three children in the fiery furnace. Why, I felt as if I had been at a camp meeting, though really I don't know anything about that."

Helen's face was glowing with the remembered enjoyment. Mrs. Bell came over and took her hand.

"My dear, you have given me some heartfelt enjoyment. I am glad to know there is some of the leaven of the Lord's love still in the different places and I do trust that it will leaven the world. Why can't we all be gracious and lovely with our own, and our daily life?"

"Then they are so unaffected with their



goodness. It is their daily life, not mere Sunday religion."

"I can't see why any one should laugh about them," exclaimed Helen indignantly.

"Can any one be cruel enough to do that?"

"They have peculiarities, of course; we all do. The newer people term them characteristics, and that makes them seem the proper touch," and Helen laughed brightly.

"I really would make a pilgrimage to see your ladies and feel well repaid. Can't you invite me when summer comes again?" asked Mrs. Bell.

"We shall all be glad to welcome any friend of Miss Grant's, and Westfield is lovely in the summer. And now I must thank you for a great deal of pleasure," and Mr. Hildreth turned eager, smiling eyes to Shirley. "We are off on a holiday, and I have to-morrow to devote to these ladies. I have seats for the 'Huguenots'—there is a wonderful new tenor singing in it. And can I propose the Historical Society Rooms in the morning for your improvement, Miss Grant?" glancing at her in an amused but persuasive fashion. "You see I do



not wish you to forget your college lore while you are shaping these youthful minds to receive it."

Shirley excused herself, though she understood that she was graciously included. The two girls assented with pleasure.

"What a delightful man!" exclaimed the elder Mrs. Bell. "Why, Westfield must be rather extraordinary, or do you look at people through rose-colored glasses, Helen? I think we could not all have had them on to-night. I could wish he were twenty years younger."

"Why?" asked Willard curiously, though he thought of a reason himself.

"Because he would have that much longer to serve the world and enjoy it," she answered with sweet gravity.



## CHAPTER IX

### DUTIES AND PLEASURES.

“SHIRLEY,” Willard said, “don’t tease Helen about Mr. Hildreth. One can see that he admires her very much. But she is different from most girls and it would spoil a nice friendship for her.”

“Oh, you saw that?” There was a saucy piquancy in the young wife’s face.

“I don’t know how he could help it. You see they are brought together a good deal and I think she feels rather indebted to him for several things. But you know it may not be real love on his part. He must have seen numbers of charming women by this time. And Helen has a curious sensitiveness about such matters. She is the youngest and the wisest girl I even knew, so truthful and straightforward, yet never making it unpleasant for any one. You see she is so interested in all things outside of herself that she is never thinking



what that or this thing means. She never studies over the compliments men pay her, or the preferences they show her, to see what she can extract out of them that is purely personal. She makes them general, the coin of society that is dealt out to every one."

"He would be worlds too old, anyhow," said Shirley reflectively.

"She likes him because there isn't any danger, but if another person suggested it, she would draw in the attractive frankness that is such a charm. I remember how father took to her, and you see how sincere and friendly she was with Mr. Morse, and how delighted she was with her friend's engagement. She is so purely truthful and honorable with herself that she really compels others to be the same. She isn't thinking a bit about marriage."

"But I want her to be married," protested the young wife.

"I want her to have the man she can love with her whole heart, and it will be a love worth untold treasures. But so far I haven't seen any one splendid enough."

"I should be jealous if you were not entirely



splendid enough for me," she returned tenderly. "But I think we must confess our secret to Miss Craven. You see she will be buying Christmas gifts soon, and examining the pretty things in the stores, and she might write to her——"

"You wise little woman! I don't believe we *can* wait until Christmas. It might get noised about."

They both laughed, but a shining moisture was in her lovely eyes.

Mr. Hildreth came for the ladies the next morning and they had a most enjoyable as well as instructive time over the treasures from all lands. It seemed to Helen that she could hardly get her fill. Suppose sometime she should turn into such a student as Miss Coultas at the college, or her father! She was beginning to understand the fascination and thought more tenderly of him.

The opera was fine and the tenor marvelous in sweetness and pathos.

"I don't know how to thank you," she said with her good-by to Mr. Hildreth, who was to take the train for home.



"You deserved a bright holiday after the three hard months," he returned. "I am sorry it could not have been made easier."

"I don't want to get spoiled in the beginning," and she glanced up with a sweet, merry archness.

"Mr. Underwood doesn't stand for much spoiling. I hope you will have a pleasant Sunday. I think I shall take tea with the Goulds. I am a privileged visitor."

"I am glad you are going there," she said unaffectedly.

Their Sunday was happy as well. Mrs. Travis had insisted upon their spending it with her, and they had a heart-cheering talk about the old summer at the seaside. Jack had developed into quite a manly fellow, still thinking a good deal of himself and his opinions. Beatrice was a really pretty young girl, and the two little boys were big now, one fitting for Columbia.

It was rather hard to get up so early in the morning. The skies were gray and lowering and the east wind blew up quite sharp. Willard would see her safely on the train, and then



the towns and villages flew by quickly until Westfield was announced.

She had not time to go home, but she was glad to be not a moment late. She shrank a little from the day's work, but there were cordial greetings from the children. And Mr. Underwood said:

"Well, did you find anything to be specially thankful for?" There was something in the tone that jarred upon her, his mood savored of sarcasm.

"Oh, so much! I believe I shall appoint a special thanksgiving for myself. Two magnificent operas, a morning at that splendid Museum, and the loveliest of all visiting times," in a kind of jubilant tone.

"Well, you were in luck!"

The children *were* difficult to manage. Recitations were poor, and the problems were enough to make one scream, she thought. A teacher's task was not an easy one. She wondered if a specialty would not have been more satisfactory.

But that afternoon, and now it had settled into a fine, sullen rain, came two nice boxes



with handles to lift them about, and a paper package of something round and hard, explained by a note from Mr. Hildreth. There were crocuses, hyacinths, and tulips. "It might be entertaining for the children to plant them and watch their growth. In six weeks some of them would bloom in the warmth of the atmosphere."

A few of the larger girls did not care. It was such messy work and soiled your hands. But there were enough to take an eager interest and make it pleasant. Several of the boys joined, and it was quite dark when they were through. Now it was raining hard.

"It's been really lonesome without you," said Mrs. Stirling. "I hope you have brought a budget of news from New York. Sometimes I think we are quite benighted. Mr. Hildreth had a number of the school folks and their wives to dinner, and I do suppose lots of turkeys suffered. We didn't go anywhere."

Helen told them about the two beautiful operas, describing the singers and following the stories.



“Why, it is next to going yourself!” declared Mrs. Stirling. “Miss Grant, you do make everything so interesting. Do you know, sometimes I wish I were a little girl going to school to you.”

“But when it came to Latin and those awful problems, and analysis, you would be glad you were grown up,” said the big girl.

Helen had been used to cliques in college, some of them not at all admirable, but they seemed quite ridiculous here, with the few in number. She had tried earnestly to make them fraternize, but the older ones considered themselves young ladies, and quite tabooed the next in age. As for the real children she found them the most tractable, the most eager to learn, ready for any experimental knowledge. Some of the boys kept their standing with the grammar school ball club. She had tried to rouse some enthusiasm among the older ones, but it had been severely discouraged and laughed at by Eastman, Lang, and Benson. The gymnasium training had not been a success either except among the younger ones. The young ladies complained that the Indian clubs



were too heavy, that the bars roughened one's hands, that the vaulting was unladylike. About every other "gym" day two or three excuses would be brought from the easily persuaded mothers.

"We are not going to train for athletics," said Georgia Winters. "I am not booked for college, but father thinks I ought to graduate here. I'd like to go to some school in New York where they train girls for real society ladies, and have dancing and afternoon teas and all that. I met a girl last summer who was at one, and every fortnight they had regular parties and could ask in their men friends. They don't say, gentlemen, any more."

"And that's queer, too. Mr. Conover said the other day that Mr. Hildreth was a perfect gentleman. I like the term."

"Well, it isn't fashionable now."

"I think Miss Grant ought to have some stylish society ways. I don't see that college training has done much for her, except to make her run through the geometry problems like a race horse. They might as well be in Sanscrit."



“What is Sanscrit?” asked another.

“Oh, one of those old dead languages that no one ever converses in. Why, we ought to be studying French. There’s some fine French poetry and—plays.”

“Girls!” exclaimed Katherine Ford, “I have a splendid idea! Let us form a club. They have them in college and they are such fun!”

“Don’t for pity’s sake ask us to read or study anything more,” sighed Hattie Dinsmore. “I’m worn out now, and just sick and tired of Shakespeare. Could you make anything out of ‘The Tempest’? Mother thought it wasn’t the things for girls to read, Miranda falling in love as soon as she had seen Ferdinand, without knowing whether he was respectable or not.”

“I don’t mean that kind of a club. I’ve read in stories where college girls went to each other’s rooms at night and made fudge and coffee and had lots of goodies. They had a chafing dish. I can cook oysters splendidly on our chafing dish.”

“But we couldn’t come here in the evening.



And cooking doesn't look very inviting to me. Candy-making is better when you ask in the boys. Why not have a regular party?"

"I don't mean that," returned Miss Ford with dignity. "It is stylish now to have a club where you vote the girls in, and if you don't like any girl you can blackball her and she must stay out. I should want it very select. And we'd have a password——"

"But what would you do?" was the query.

"Oh, we'd sit around and discuss our likes and dislikes, and, well, I don't just know. Men talk politics, but we don't care about that. We might take up the fashions, or read a novel and talk about it. Oh, we'd find things to do. Let's hunt up some of the college stories and learn what the girls did. There are two or three capital ones in the library, but I've forgotten them now."

"Girls, there's just six minutes to the language lesson, and it's an awful grind. All those words above and under the lines, and relations and everything, confuse me so that I can't tell whether I'm first cousin to anything under the sun or not."



“And to-morrow is composition day and I haven’t an idea——”

“So hush, and let’s study.”

The six minutes were up. It was a wretched recitation.

“You will take the same lesson again and lose the marks for this,” said Miss Grant quietly.

“At all events I’ll be primed for to-morrow. My composition is done. And you will be so surprised!” exclaimed Miss Winters.

It had been very cold since Thanksgiving. The two or three flurries of snow had not amounted to much, but it was announced that Jones’s pond was frozen over hard, and that there was splendid skating up the river.

“Miss Grant, do you skate?” asked Lilian, as they were walking home.

“Indeed I do. It used to be one of our great pastimes,” and she experienced a sudden exhilaration.

“Will you go to-morrow?”

“With pleasure.” Helen felt her blood tingle at the thought. This might stir up the children. There had been nothing much since the



day of the fern-gathering. Of course she was asked out to tea, but some of the best people rather held aloof. They didn't want to ask Miss Parker, or Miss Jaynes, whose father was a journeyman carpenter and had worked about their houses. They didn't quite know whether they ought to make an exception, and Mrs. Eastman's verdict settled it. But then, Helen didn't particularly like the teas except at Mrs. Dean's and Mrs. Millard's. She had been asked to join an evening whist club, but declined.

It was clear and cold on Saturday, but the sun shone with a certain jolly aspect as if he was quivering with fun at the blue noses and red cheeks he evoked. Jones's pond was in a rather low place between two rises of ground. Autumn rains filled it up. Not being very deep, it was safe for the children.

Helen put on her short skirt, her jacket trimmed with fur, and her fur cap that had a red wing for trimming.

"Oh, how handsome you look!" ejaculated Lilian. "I wish I could have a color like that and a clear complexion."



"I'm afraid you wouldn't take the trouble," laughed Helen. "Few good things come without an effort."

"Why, I'd—what would I have to do?"

"There's the morning bath and a good rub."

"But I wouldn't have time, truly."

"Oh, yes, you would if you were in real earnest. And at least one good brisk walk through the day. You remember I've told you you lag too much. You want vim and spirit."

"But you see when things haven't gone right with you, and you don't just know what is best—and—and I never thought study so hard. I can get along with the plain things——"

"Let us walk up now. Throw your shoulders back and draw long even breaths without any effort."

"But it tires me," rather fretfully.

"You would soon get used to it. And I wish you would practice with the Indian clubs or the dumbbells."

Lilian gave a long sigh.

"Oh, hear the children!"

They crossed a stubble field and came in sight



of the pond. It was half covered with a merry throng laughing and shouting. Then some one cried, "Oh, there's Miss Grant!"

Allen Millard came over to her. "I'm trying to teach Ruth to skate," he said. "Oh, I'd like to see you. May I put on your skates?"

"Why, I've been used to waiting on myself. In a girls' college you do not have any beaux," smiling brightly.

"But I'd like to," wistfully.

"Very well. I'll be obliged. You skate?"

"Oh, yes, some. I thought at first I never would be able to, and I had to try hard. I didn't like to give up everything. I have only one skate on because I can manage better with Ruth."

"Thank you ever so much." She stood up.

He swung his cap. "Make way for Miss Grant," he cried joyously.

"Come, Lilian."

The children fell back a little. Some of them flew like birds in a child's fearless fashion. Helen took rather long slow strides at first, smiling to the right and left and waving her hand. Allen watched her with delight. The



children paused to look at her. Then she caught one little girl by the hand and they spun round to the great delight of the others.

“Oh me, Miss Grant! Me next!” and some eager hands were thrust out. She took one and another.

Lilian skated very well, she saw, and she nodded approvingly to her. The pond rang with shouts and laughter. Now and then some one had a tumble, but the inexperienced ones kept near the edge. Presently she glided in and sat down on a large stone. She had unfastened her jacket but now she closed it again.

“Oh, Miss Grant, that was splendid! Only the reaches were not long enough,” Allen exclaimed delightedly. “I wish you’d go up on the river with me. It’s safe enough, for the channel is not very deep and it freezes pretty hard. If there’s any danger, Mr. Hildreth sends his man out to mark it. I can’t skate like that, I don’t know that I shall ever be able to, but it is so exhilarating. And it’s something you do your own self.”

The boy had a really pretty face with large, soft, wistful eyes.



“And how does Ruth make out?”

“This is the first of her trying, except a little bit near the house. She is afraid. Ruth——”

Ruth came shyly. She was fair-haired with round wondering blue eyes.

“I want to learn so much,” she said in a pleading manner.

“And you will in a little while. You are in the kindergarten?”

“But I’m going in the primary soon. I almost got in last summer, but not quite. And I want to get in the high school. Allen thinks it so nice.”

Allen smiled with a little confusion.

“Oh, Miss Grant, skate again, won’t you? You went so splendidly!” cried half a dozen voices.

“This place is for you little folks. I’m afraid I shall run over you.”

“Oh no. We will keep off a little. Go just as fast as you can. It is like a bird flying.”

“A great big bird among a lot of little wrens,” she replied laughingly

But she consented and did her best. The children laughed, shouted, and clapped in wild





*Amy Brooks.*

THEN SHE CAUGHT ONE LITTLE GIRL BY THE HAND AND THEY  
SPUN AROUND. — *Page 221.*







delight. Then she sat down again and they gathered around, asking eager questions and telling bits about themselves and what they were doing. They patted her cap and brushed the fur on her coat, and one little tot said:

“Oh, I wish you were my teacher, you are so pretty!”

Then she began to take off her skates. “Do you think you could go on the river?” Allen asked pleadingly. “It’s moonlight now, and it will be just splendid Monday night if it is clear. It’s a long walk.”

“Oh, I don’t mind walking. Yes, if it is clear. If not, let us say Tuesday.”

“Oh, I’m so glad!” and the boy’s face shone with gladness. “I think we will go home now. Come, Ruth.”

He picked up her skates and swung them over his shoulder. “Let me carry yours, Miss Grant.”

“Oh, no,” in a softened tone.

“I’d rather,” pleadingly.

So she allowed him, but she said:

“I’m glad you thought of your little sister first. That is the mark of a gentleman.”



He blushed with delight.

Lilian Firth looked the better for her outing. She went again with her aunt in the afternoon to make some calls, a thing she did not like very much. Helen wrote letters in her room until Jane said:

“Mr. Hildreth is downstairs, Miss Grant, and would like to see you.”

She went down bright and smiling to meet him.

“I hear you were out on a frolic this morning,” he exclaimed, holding her hand. “I have a great mind to ask how old you are just now.”

“Sixteen!” she replied, with a ripple of laughter. “The little ones were charming. If I could only imbue the older ones with as much enthusiasm! Is there safe skating on the river?”

“Oh, yes, now; will be, if this weather continues. There’s plenty of space. From the flagpole up it is all right, but I don’t like the children to trust it down below, though the large boys do. It changes up above the second bridge and runs off wild, spreading over the



country, as you learned the day of the fern hunt."

"I had a lovely cavalier this morning and he invited me to go skating Monday evening. It is the first time a young man has invited me out since I have been here."

She looked merry and mischievous, as if it had not weighed heavily on her mind.

"May I ask who the brave man was?"

"Oh, am I so formidable?" She gave a gay rippling laugh. "It's—well, I think my favorite scholar among the boys, Allen Millard."

"A fine boy."

"Yes, I wish there were more like him."

"If it is clear and moonlight—one couldn't happen without the other," a vague smile lighting his face, "you will have a delightful time. Yes, go by all means. And now let us talk about your friends. I don't know when I have enjoyed anything so much. That little Southern beauty is very fascinating, and the mother most delightful. They set at nought the feud commonly supposed to affect that relationship."



"Mother Bell is one of the sweetest and best of women. She was my dear friend and adviser in a very dreary and troubled time. And her husband was a wise and tender one. I should like to have been born into that family, and belong to them."

Could she not have belonged to them in a different relationship, he wondered? For the young man evidently had a tender regard for her.

"Did you live near each other?" he asked at a venture. He wanted to hear her talk. Her voice had a joyous strain and all its inflections were unusually perfect. She certainly showed some fine training. And the pretty changes in her face were worth watching.

"Oh, no," and she gave a retrospective smile. "I was a little country girl and a very kind lady sent me to a most admirable school, a real home school in a lovely, cultivated old town. I met that pretty Daisy they talked about, you remember, who had such a brief life. I visited her and somehow—you never can tell what brings about likes for certain people and indif-



ference to others who are quite as good and worthy."

"And—the young man?" tentatively.

"Oh, Willard? We were such friends. My father had set me to learning Greek in a hard, dry way, and Willard helped me over rough places. He studied law and will some day be a member of his firm. He used to come up to college—we could have our friends, you know, and I had taken up Shirley Chardavoyne, who was fine in some things and very deficient in others. And she fell in love with me,—girls do that quite often, you know, but this was a very real love and she wrote me beautiful verses. She *is* a poet. And Willard fell in love with her. It was natural," with a soft, entrancing laugh.

There was none of *that* kind of love between them, he decided, or she would have shown a different feeling, flushed a little perhaps. He wondered why he felt glad that it was so.

"Tell me about your father. There is a book dedicated to his memory. Why, he was a great scholar!"

There were many things she could relate



without touching upon infelicities, such as his last friendship with the Reverend Mr. Walters, and his death that in a way was serene.

"I am glad you did not go to London," he said in a very earnest tone. "It would have been no kind of life for a young girl—for you," with a fervent emphasis.

"Oh, I didn't want to go. It was then Mrs. Bell comforted me so much. I never can be grateful enough to her."

"And about Hope? What sort of a town was that?" He did enjoy her talk. She neither put herself in the foreground nor held herself back; her impersonal manner held him with a charm.

It was getting dusky. She heard Jane beginning with the tea things.

"We must have a light," she exclaimed, rising. "And oh, there comes Mrs. Stirling!"

That lady and her niece had had a rather pleasant time calling. She came in with pink cheeks and bright eyes, and greeted her visitor cordially.

Mr. Hildreth declared presently that he must return home.



"No, you must stay and have a cup of tea with us," said Mrs. Stirling persuasively. "It has been so long since you have dropped in to tea."

"I do not think I will need much coaxing. I sometimes tire of my own solitary meals when I have no guests."

Then they discussed neighborhood matters and the coming Christmas, church festivities, Christmas trees, and the new proprietor of the paper mill who was putting in up-to-date machinery, and who had purchased the old Crawford house and was having that put in order.

"There are five or six children," he said, "some quite large, and they may be a new trial for you, Miss Grant," with a rather humorous expression.

Helen noticed that he made no reference to the Thanksgiving visit. Did she quite like having secrets with him? Yet she liked him very much.



## CHAPTER X

### SOWING BESIDE ALL WAYS

HELEN overruled Lilian Firth's objections and she was ready to accompany her on the skating expedition. Helen felt she had been a little rash in promising, but the splendid exercise had tempted her.

"Do you suppose there will be any other venturesome people out?" she asked of Allen.

"Oh, lots of them. And Mr. Hildreth said to skate along the edge soon after we passed the first bridge. It will shorten the walk a good deal."

They picked their way down. The going was rather rough. Here was where she had crossed over the day she felt so lonesome and tired, and had run away and met with an adventure. She laughed softly to herself. But her sympathies went warmly out to the boy with a little limp, who trudged along buoyantly.



It was a glorious night with a full moon that silvered the leafless twigs and made great reaches of whitened meadow-land that suggested snow. It sparkled on the river as if it were sown with diamonds. The air had softened and there was no wind.

"It will snow in a day or two," said Lilian.  
"It is in the air."

"Oh, I hope not!" cried Allen.

"But there is grand fun in a snowstorm and after," declared Helen.

"We can put on our skates here," began the boy.

"Now you must allow me to wait upon myself," protested Helen, and while they were making ready several others came up. Helen knew two of the girls and with them was their mother, Mrs. Ridley.

"I'm glad to know you, Miss Grant. And I am doubly glad that you skate. You will set a good example to our supersensitive young ladies. Of course you know some of the doctors say that a girl should never skate, but I've done it ever since I was seven. I've had four children, I do my own housekeeping, and a



good deal of spring gardening. I'm round and rosy, I have no fads about eating, I am never ill and very rarely take a cold. We women do not get out of doors enough, dawdle too much. You want to keep your blood in circulation. Come, girls!"

"Hello, Miss Grant! I had half a mind to ask you to-day if you didn't want to join a skating party, but I wasn't quite sure I should go myself. Mrs. Underwood doesn't skate, more's the pity. And she has a cold. But the night was so fine I couldn't resist. Well, Allen! And Miss Firth! Isn't that Mrs. Ridley ahead? She's the champion skater of the county, I think."

"I had an invitation," announced Helen laughingly. "And it is one of my pleasures."

"It's a fine country amusement, worlds better than playing bridge in a warm room."

They started off. Helen was truly glad to see Mr. Underwood. Lilian and he spun on ahead. Helen held in a little for Allen's sake.

After the turn in the river they saw quite a throng ahead of them. Here the river widened out again, but was rather shallow.



"Now I want you to skate your best, Miss Grant, and not mind me," said Allen. "I shall enjoy seeing you distance some of them, as I can't do it."

One and another nodded to her without waiting for an introduction. There was much merry laughter. There were many of the schoolboys, but a good sprinkling of grown folk, too.

"A dare!" cried Mr. Underwood. "That big tree up there the stake."

They were as fleet as the wind. One and another turned to look at them. Neither seemed to gain an inch.

"Underwood's a first-class skater. That girl can't beat him," said a man.

"She's the high-school teacher."

"By jove, she goes like the wind!" said another.

Helen's training had given her the keynote to running, not to waste her efforts in the beginning. Now she spurred up as the great sycamore loomed dark before them. Long straight strides with hardly a motion of the body. She passed the tree, turned and faced



him. How her radiant countenance glowed and her eyes shone like stars!

"Well, I'm beaten! I'm quite out of practice. I didn't skate much last winter," he said excusingly.

"And I didn't skate a bit all summer," she replied with comical gravity.

The others came up. Some of the men chaffed Mr. Underwood, who was a little nettled.

"Oh!" cried Allen when they met, "it was splendid! I didn't think you would beat, but I was sort of praying in my heart. Mr. Underwood led the van last winter."

"But Mrs. Ridley is excellent."

"Yes. They are about neck and neck. Now please take a turn with me. Oh, Miss Grant, you don't quite know what it is to be——" and there was a quiver in the voice.

"But you are making a fine scholar. After all, it is a man's brains and not his heels that win him the victories of life."

"How you comfort one!"

They went slowly down, and he was proud of his lovely partner. The young men were



begging introductions to her. Truth to tell, they had felt a little afraid of so much erudition.

It was a very jolly time, and Mrs. Ridley said to her, "Sometime, when we are fresher, I'll try you for a race. But my! You are an elegant skater!"

She was pretty tired when they reached home, but she took a good rub-down and slept late the next morning.

"We ought to have gone and seen the show," said Dick Eastman in a sarcastic tone. "She beat Woody all to rags. I bet I could have run her down."

Eastman had been at the club playing whist for small stakes, though his father had forbidden that. It was just among the boys.

There were strugglings and heartburnings, and much wasted time planning about Christmas. Katherine Ford was going to have a real dancing party on Christmas Eve, which would be Monday night. Georgia Winters would have hers on Thursday of the week, so they wouldn't clash. She was beginning to



hold her head quite high, for she had written two rather pretty poetic compositions and one had been published in the *Gazette*.

Christmas fell on Tuesday. School would close the previous Friday. Helen and Mr. Underwood had been very much engrossed in some new plans, though they could not be put into execution until after the midwinter examinations.

It had snowed the very next day after the skating frolic. And a few days after snow again, then when the roads were broken the sleighing was excellent. Mr. Hildreth was a kind of public benefactor just now. He took the Miss Goulds out in his two-seated sleigh, he made a party for some of the larger girls, and several of the busy mothers who had not many pleasures. Sometimes the sleigh was sent with Martin. And one afternoon he took Mrs. Stirling and Lilian.

"It will be your turn on Saturday," he announced to Helen gravely.

"Another party? I am afraid you are getting too wild and youthful?"

"Would you like me to be set back?"



"No!" decisively, with a bright upward look. "I like you best just as you are."

She did not color at the frank admission. He knew there was no coquetry in it.

"Having done my duty by my neighbors, I am going to please myself, and have a pleasant talk with you. Mr. Underwood said you had been working very hard lately. You must have a little diversion as well as the others."

His tone was grave and straightforward. She would be silly to attach any meaning to it.

"That is my business, you know. And now we are soon to have quite a long holiday."

"I would like to know how you are going to spend it. So we will talk it over," he said with his adieu.

He came as he had announced. The light, dainty cutter would hold but two. There was a sparkle of frostiness in the air and the sun was rather pale.

"Some more snow," he said. "Now that it has come I should like it to go on. It is fine winter weather."

The horses were full of spirit. It was ex-



hilarating to be spinning along over the soundless road.

"I suppose you have heard there is to be an influx of young people," he began. "We are to gather them up for the school. I have met this Mr. Henderson and he seems a very nice, sensible man, tired of city life and its surrounding, its temptations, too. The paper mill has been on the down-hill road for two years. He understands the business and has plenty of capital. And he has seven children of his own and an orphan niece."

"What a crowd! They can't all be in the high school, though."

"The son is past seventeen. He means to take him into business when he has a little more education. The niece is sixteen, has had some training abroad. There are twin girls past fifteen, who have spent a year in a boarding school which he didn't seem to like. There are four younger children."

"We have no commercial course. O dear, I wish there were fifty new children! I should so like to have all the divisions. We cannot have any seniors," with an arch laugh.



"I'm afraid they will not be ready for it even next year. The smallness of it troubles me."

"But you see you have been with such a crowd. And isn't it easier?" he asked.

"You want enough for a spirit of rivalry. There are five large boys banded together, with Dick Eastman for a leader. Mr. Underwood gave them a good stirring up and since then they have done better. But you should hear the foolish questions they ask with an innocent air that *did* deceive me at first, and I was very anxious to increase their supply of knowledge. Then, as the boys say, I 'caught on,' " and she turned a mirthful face toward him. "Now I refer him to a rule or his book. It is a kind of covert strife as to which shall come out best. You see if there were two or three others to make a variety, but here one always upholds the other. Eastman isn't truthful. He can wriggle out of anything with the smoothest air. And I just hate those miserable, mean subterfuges."

He could see that she hated all things that were not honest and upright. What a splendid boy she would make! Then he would offer



her a father's consideration and affection. To have a son like that!

"I'm telling tales out of school," and she flushed in spite of the cold. "I don't dare ever to say all of this to Mr. Underwood. He has an idea that all boys have to pass through this transition period, and that somehow they come out right. But he is very kind and helpful and makes them respect my position outwardly, at all events."

"It is a hard place for a young girl to fill. I did not realize that at first," he said with a sort of sympathizing regret.

"But I like the fight, too," and she smiled enchantingly. "I like to convince myself that my four years' training has done something for me. I like to surmount difficulties. And I'm not finding fault, do not think that. I'm going straight on until my year is up, at least. I think of old Carlyle—'Not what I have, but what I do, is my kingdom.' And I want to do something worth while, to have some influence, to pay back the good and kindly things that have been done to me. Oh, am I a foolishly erratic girl with a head full of impossible



ideals? But you have a quality that I found in my dear Mrs. Bell. You seem to win one to confidence, and one doesn't feel afraid to trust you, to rely upon you. I think if any one was in bitter trouble, if any young fellow had gone astray, you would be a splendid and judicious friend."

Her voice rang with penetrative earnestness and touched him. How few understood—and to be appreciated for a duty was a rare thing!

"I have tried it several times. I hope I shall not have lived quite in vain, and at the last I shall not be ashamed to give an account of my stewardship."

Then they lapsed into silence. She wished he knew Mr. Morse, and there was Gordon Danforth. She thought she would like to tell him of the young fellow's first sacrifice and his three years' banishment in western wilds, and then his relinquishing a sure prosperity in the hope of doing something better than mere money-getting. Ah, if *he* had such a son! She was momentarily jealous lest his own father should not appreciate him to the full.



They passed pretty Rossmore in her snowy robes, here and there a wreath of faint blue curling smoke rising out of some chimney and drifting away. On some of the farms, chickens and cows were out for a little exercise. A lovely pastoral scene like a picture, with the outlines a little vague from the grayness stealing over the sky.

"What are your plans for the holidays?" he inquired presently.

"Oh!" she seemed to awake from a dream. "I shall go to New York, and to Kingsland Manor, I think. After all, the time will be short, but I shall try to crowd it full. You see I am foolishly fond of enjoyment."

"As youth should be. I wonder if I shall rouse your jealousy when I say I am going to N—— and shall see your dear *Alma Mater*, Professor Yarrow and his wife, and that wonderful little daughter. They are dying—think of that from the grave professor—to hear how you succeed."

"Oh! I half envy you!" and she turned her face toward him, wistful yet brilliant with pleasure.



“It’s a case where you want to be divided again,” she continued merrily. “And my astral body wouldn’t do them much good. But I’m so glad you are going. Oh, I shall just count on hearing about them when you return! You will have a delightful time.”

“And on the return,—I wonder if it would be presuming to call on your friend at the Manor? She gave me a cordial invitation. I have a great curiosity to see her household, her orphan asylum, as you call it.”

“Why, she would be glad to see you, I know. And we could have a nice visit talking over matters.”

“I’m taking Dr. Johnson’s advice about keeping my friendships in repair by making new ones. Miss Grant, as you grow older make some friends younger than yourself. The older ones drop out of life and you may not, then you are left alone. And there is a vim and joyousness in the spirit of the younger ones that may keep you from growing old. Ah! we all do like youth, and how prodigal we are of it, and



“The something sweet  
That follows youth with flying feet.”

The sun had grown paler and now the lavender gray clouds rose up and quite obscured it, while a slow-moving, sullen wind began to moan through the leafless trees. He tucked the wolf robe closer around her. How soft and white it was! She could have buried her face in it.

“Now for a spin!” he exclaimed. “Fancy yourself in an auto.”

And spin they surely did. Trees, houses, and fences flew by with a blur. The horses felt they were on the homeward road, and jingled the bells merrily. A few flakes of snow drifted about.

“It spoiled the skating,” he said, “but we have had this in its place. I wish the day had been pleasanter for your outing.”

“You have made it very pleasant,” she returned, with grave sweetness.

There followed a very busy week. School was to close on Friday, though Christmas was not until Tuesday. They were all to go to the Auditorium for some closing exercises.



Just before that Miss Grant demanded the attention of all the pupils.

"You are aware," she began, "that the mid-winter examination will take place next month and that will determine your standing until the close of the school year. There will be a reorganization of all the classes and perhaps some change in the studies. It is my earnest desire that you will be able to show a decided improvement that will not only be to your credit, but to that of the school. Each child has a duty toward that, a fact children do not seem to consider. You have been provided with a beautiful building and many of the appliances of the higher education, but it rests with you to improve the advantages. I hope we shall all work together with a hearty good will during the next term, and I wish you all a very Merry Christmas."

Some of the children hung about her fondly. She had won a little love, she was sure of that, and there certainly was some improvement in them. They had not come up to her expectations, it was true.

"And only a few of them will," said Miss



Parker. "You see there's the home environment; the common ways, the incorrect speech, the careless habits. The mothers hope they will outgrow it all. A teacher can't do everything. If she can stuff a little knowledge into their addle-pates she must be satisfied with that."

It was not encouraging nor enthusiastic, indeed it rather depressed Helen.

"You must not lay it to heart," consoled Mr. Underwood. "You have done so much better than I was afraid you would that I feel quite jubilant. And now we will go off and refresh ourselves with chances and changes. I hope all yours will be pleasant," and he bade her a very friendly adieu.

Lilian Firth had decided to go home, as she called her brother's house, and keep the feast with them.

"I don't quite know what to make of her," Mrs. Stirling said confidentially to Helen. "She is a nice, truthful, helpful girl, and I shall be glad to have her. But somehow her heart doesn't seem set on advancement. There may be schools that she could teach with her



present knowledge, but they would be in some far-away place. That unlucky love affair has upset her. And I can't tell you, Miss Grant, how much I have enjoyed your being here! It has opened a new world to me, old as I am. Your reading and your talks have been such a pleasure, you have so much courage and hope, you see so much good everywhere, so much joy, and you are not afraid of using it. I think some of us make mistakes and believe that it is laying up treasures in heaven when we are so choice of it, while it is for our everyday use instead. I shall be so glad to welcome you back."

Then she had not wasted her efforts here. She felt moved, gratified.

She went in to see Mrs. Underwood, who had not been very well and was rather cap-tious.

"I wish you cared to come without a special invitation," she began rather upbraidingly. "I'd counted on having a good time with you. But you fuss over the children so much. You are at the Deans' and the Millards', and Heaven only knows where!"



"You have so many old friends," in a tone of excuse.

"As if I hadn't room for any new ones!"

"Oh, there has been so much to do. Remember that I am quite new to these methods, the best methods. I have to study out many ways, dubious ways sometimes," smiling gravely, "and often retrace my steps. There are exercises to go over and over, occasionally the last is worse than the first, instead of being better. And then one doesn't feel entertaining."

"Oh, you are taking it too seriously. And you see by Miss Parker what that amounts to. She is as good as gold, and conscientious to a certain extent. But she has lopped off all the frills, and the frills are half the charm of life as well as of gowns. You can be a charming woman, Miss Grant, and you have enough good looks, too. For heaven's sake don't sink into a scrupulous, highly moral old maid and be disappointed that you can't set the world straight. There'll be teachers and schools and imps of children when you are dust and ashes. Look up a nice lover and get married."



“Why are you not always happy then?”  
There was a bit of mischief in Helen’s eyes.

“I’ve had an awful cold; the grippe, I think. And I wanted to go away and be jolly, but—headaches and nerves that feel as if some place would snap, and a dark brown taste in your mouth and a hundred other things! Well, go off and have a grand time. I’ll be better-natured when you return.”

Helen packed up a few things. She must do some shopping, get a new winter suit and a few books the library did not own. And her heart beat unwontedly at the thought of seeing those so dear to her. There were others at Hope. Would she ever get to them again?

It was odd, she admitted, but of all the people she had met she was most interested in the Goulds and Mrs. Dean. She was simply a plain woman who seemed to know how to make the best of everything. Some of the neighbors called her a poor housekeeper. It was often nine o’clock at night before the supper dishes were washed. And she admitted frankly that she never studied a cook-book, neither was she troubled about any special



style of diet. The children were healthy and happy, nicely but plainly dressed.

"I really cannot spend much time or money over any but their actual needs, and I want to train them not to be ashamed of their station in life. It seems a pity to me that people dress their children so much, but I simply can't do it."

"I'm sure Lois is a great favorite, and one of my best scholars," Helen said approvingly. "The other day she was the only one who knew about radium. Of course, it is a new thing."

"Their father read about Madame Curie and the strange way they came to discover it, and how wonderful its heating properties were. When he comes to any new discovery or experiment he wants them to hear about it. I think he would have made quite a scholar, only he had to go to work so young. But he thinks that isn't a good reason for a man remaining ignorant."

Ah, if there were more parents in such earnest!

The baby was bathed, given his supper, car-



ried upstairs, and put in his crib while the supper was cooking. The children had their play hour. The happy group around the table was like a picture, Helen thought. They were not rude or boisterous, though they talked or laughed, or told some bright incident or a new fact that had come out at school. Lois, with a small basket, went round and gathered up knives and forks and spoons without any unnecessary rattle, then the plates, and brought on the simple dessert. All the while the conversation flowed on harmoniously, and there seemed no haste to leave the table. Then Lois and Ethel helped their mother clear the rest of the table, put on the cloth, and the children went into a small ante-room to study their lessons. Mrs. Dean took up a bit of sewing.

"I don't see how you keep them so good-natured," Helen said in surprise.

"Why, they are healthy children, not over-worked, and have time for play. Of course there are little tiffs, but they soon learn that each child has equal rights. One isn't made to give in to the other unless there is a good reason. Lois is quite a womanly little girl al-



ready, but I don't mean to have her grow up too soon, nor carry too many burdens. And they get plenty of sleep. I let them lie as long as possible in the morning. I can get my breakfast easier alone. And at night I send them out for a little run in the fresh air before they go to bed. Since they are here, it is my duty to give them good sound bodies."

Lois wanted to walk with father when he took Helen home and her mother consented. Helen felt as if she had been reading a page out of a book when she went there. Why couldn't other mothers be as wise and judicious, and give the home an air of restfulness?

The four months had widened her horizon a good deal, Helen felt. She was glad of the little break and she wanted to see her friends so much. She would have liked a few days with the old college tutors, and she almost envied Mr. Hildreth his visit with the Yarrows.



## CHAPTER XI

### A MERRY CHRISTMAS

“SHIRLEY, why are you so mysterious?” Helen asked laughingly as they rose from the dinner table. They were well and had welcomed her warmly, but there was an indescribable charm about her friend that roused Helen’s curiosity.

They went to the pretty parlor, where the lights were softened and already some Christmas greens were in evidence. The piano stood invitingly open. Helen sat down and ran her fingers over the keys.

“I’m starved for some music of my own making,” she exclaimed. “And I miss the college and chapel singing. There is a sort of cultivated playing, and the young girls who pound or wander through the latest lesson, and ragtime songs. There are some good voices in school,—we are not rich enough to have a



regular musical trainer. I'd like to start a glee club. They have a mandolin club and a band at the clubhouse, but only men and boys belong to that. Mr. Underwood has a fine voice, but he will not even take the trouble to sing in church. And Lilian Firth used to sing in the choir of her country church. O dear!" in a perplexed tone.

"Leave all the school matters alone," insisted Shirley. "Come over here. We have a great Christmas surprise for you. I have been keeping it almost a month and it has nearly worn me out. You are going up to Kingsland on Monday, and we must go quite early Tuesday morning. So we have decided——"

"What is all this preamble about?" Helen glanced from one to the other; both faces were full of smiles.

"It is a Christmas gift we have for you," Willard said. "I must be the donor. So—imagine the loveliest presentation speech—I couldn't say anything beautiful enough," and Shirley's eyes were luminous with emotion. "Open your box. From the two people who love you dearly."



It was folded in paper and tied with a white satin ribbon.

“The bow is too beautiful to disturb,” glancing up archly. “I hope you haven’t been extravagant. I am only a half-country school ma’am, you must remember, really fallen from my high estate.”

She untied it as she saw the curiously repressed look husband and wife exchanged, and lifted the cover. There lay a beautiful book in a pale lavender tint and gilt. “Poems, by Shirley Chardevoyne.”

“Oh!” was all Helen said, too much surprised for any other word.

Shirley turned the cover and title page. There was an inscription——

“To my dearest friend, H. G.”

Helen reached up her arms and clasped them about Shirley’s neck. For a moment neither spoke.

Presently Shirley said, “Oh, do not let us get unduly sentimental! I want to tell you the story.”

She dropped down beside Helen on the divan.



“And I want to hear it. And how you could keep the secret,” and Helen’s voice was tremulous with emotion.

“It was awfully hard,” and her pretty face was wrinkled up with the remembered endeavor, making it like the veriest girl’s.

“But the story. Tell it while I am getting my delight into shape.”

“Do you recall the person—Willard’s friend—who set some songs to music? He had a friend in a publishing house, a Mr. Lenhart, who liked one of them very much, and Mr. Harrison brought him here one evening. I played and sang, and talked about you, and the old poem you made me write about Strephon and Phyllis. And he said it was a gem. Then he wanted to see some of the others, and I’ve promised him a sight of you, too,” pressing her hand fondly, and giving a rippling laugh. “Willard said he had thought of collecting them in a book when he was a little richer, because they suggested so many of the lovely things in our lives. He took them all away with him and said he would consider it, and it might not be so costly if it was out for



a Christmas holiday book. Well, they planned and planned and decided to bring them out, though everybody says poetry is not a money-making scheme. But we didn't either of us care for the money, and I thought how utterly lovely it would be for Christmas gifts. That was long before Thanksgiving. Didn't I keep my secret well?" triumphantly.

"Oh, you darling!"

"You know I never dreamed of being a real poet and writing grand things. I don't care especially about fame. I think I should feel as if I were a sort of fraud when people praised me. I love to write verses for you and Willard, and sometimes a little thing comes in my mind just like a strain of music, but I couldn't work days and nights over a thing and polish it and do it according to rule. So I didn't expect anything but just the pure pleasure. Only Mr. Lenhart insisted that it should be put on the market, that it would be a shame to spend so much money for nothing. And they found some beautiful plates that had been very little used—of course I didn't mind that," smiling. "But if it was offered for sale I was



afraid it would leak out to you. We bound Miss Craven over, and she is delighted. She will tell you all that herself."

Willard's face was alight with enjoyment as he watched his wife and the fascinating changes that seemed to make her face prettier each time.

"I sent a copy to father, but all the rest are to be real Christmas gifts and mailed to-morrow. I'm so glad to have something of my very own to send to the girls."

"We came near a dispute on one point," interposed Willard. "I don't know which you would have liked best, but I felt—somehow—" hesitating.

"About the dedication," and Shirley's face was brilliant with eager interest. "I wanted it 'Helen Grant,' but Willard said that it would seem like a precious thing just between us and the ones who loved you best, who would surely know——"

"Willard was right." Helen passed her hand over to him with a warm and sincere clasp. "It does seem to unite us more closely and save some explanation to people that



we do not care about. Yes, I am truly glad."

"I have to laugh when I think how you hammered away about the Strephon poem. And I really was disgusted. If I had not been afraid you would have thrown me over I never would have done it. And the other *was* a foolish thing," blushing rosily. "Oh, how good you were to me in those days, Helen! And I used to get jealous of Leslie. I had a charming letter from her, and I know she will be very happy. And what a surprise for Miss Morse!"

"You will have to go back and take a post-graduate course," said Helen with mock seriousness.

"It would be in verse alone, certainly not in mathematics or chemistry," she laughed.

"I don't know what to say, Shirley," and Helen clasped her closely, deeply moved.

"You are not to say anything or I shall begin to count up what you have done for me, and be so deeply in debt that I shall have to write another book. Just now I am living



poetry. But there is another splendid side to it. I dare say the cover and the lovely engravings help. It has had a real, truly sale," laughing delightedly. "Willard advanced some money and Mr. Lenhart says he will get it back and more, too. And there are some pretty notices of it that make me feel quite proud. You know what the girl who edited the 'Miscellany' said—'that it suggested the old English poetry.' I didn't quite like it then but I understand now, and here is one that says the same thing. And they all seem to think it so musical, and one says the pathos is so sincere and tender without being at all morbid. Why, I didn't think it was so fine until I read what the papers say about it."

"I think they have been very good to her," commented Willard. "But they are all so spontaneous, no striving after effect."

"Because I had you and Willard to write about. And though you are extraordinary people you are not up on stilts, but plain and natural. Mother doesn't say a word. Have we talked you dumb?" smiling over to Mrs. Bell.



"Helen will understand how I enjoy it all," returned Mrs. Bell with deep feeling.

The criticisms had been very kind. One gave her a "practised pen" another called her "musical to the finger tips."

"I hope you will not be submerged in vanity," Helen said with a sort of tender mirth. "And I do congratulate you from the depths of my heart."

"A true and generous heart," was Willard's comment.

When she retired to her room Helen felt she could not sleep, so she went over her lovely and grateful Christmas gift. Nothing could have given her more sincere pleasure.

There were some poems she had not seen before, some that she knew had been written for Willard. How dainty and delicate they were, not without gushing love! Shirley *was* a puzzle to her. She was glad she had never tired the child even in her wayward moods. She would always charm Willard, there was a rarity to her sweetness.

Helen wondered the next morning if she had dreamed it, but no, there lay the beautiful



book. Even now her heart was strangely moved. Would any one come so near in this other life? Would she find girls again like Shirley and Leslie, and several others who had so touched her heart?

"We were so full of our own affairs we never inquired about yours," said Willard at the breakfast table. "How goes the school?"

"Not as I could wish. I sometimes wonder if I did choose rightly. There are some really encouraging scholars—but I question whether I have not had life too easy."

Shirley laughed at that.

"Of course the girls at college had gone through the troublesome period——"

"Why, you were always helping some one. And that funny Miss Carr, who was such a fright. What has become of her?"

"She is doing quite well, I think, learning the real uses of life, one of which is not living for one's self wholly. I have not lost faith in her because she does try."

"And are there any queer people in Westfield?"



Helen wrinkled her face mirthfully.

"There are some new ones coming in. I shall begin with four children, young people from one family. I really do want the school larger. And I want them to take more interest, and to advance."

"And the pleasures? Are there any parties? Any splendid athletic exercises?" asked Shirley.

"Oh! I couldn't even get up an enthusiasm about basketball. We had some fine skating, and I distanced the principal in a race. The girls are afraid of not being lady-like. I suspect it would set the mothers crazy to see the girls vault and jump and run and give a college yell. Even the boys are not very wild about those things."

"What do they do?"

"The big boys go down to the clubhouse and I think they play cards a good deal. And the women have a number of whist clubs. I have been asked to join but it does take too much time. Then there are several church societies, sewing for the poor and doing a little work among the mill hands. That is in the



lower part of the town, a settlement by itself, and most of the saloons are there."

There was a little tinkle of the bell.

"Hello!" and Willard, springing up, ushered in Miss Craven. Helen kissed her warmly.

"Why, you must have taken an early start!" he said in surprise.

"I did. I found there was some more buying to do and I wanted to see Helen," Miss Craven explained.

"And I am very much alive after the grand surprise."

"Wasn't it lovely!" Juliet's face was beaming with gladness."

"I didn't really find words to express my surprise and delight. And that you should all have kept such a secret! I've hardly looked at a paper or magazine the last fortnight, there were so many things to occupy my attention. Why! I think Shirley will be quite an honor to our dear *Alma Mater*, if she didn't get up to the seniors."

"Oh, I may never distinguish myself again. There are women who have written one fine



novel and never done anything afterward. And I shouldn't like these delightful critics to say—'Miss Chardevoyne has fallen off lamentably.' ”

“Do you mean to take our girl away, Miss Craven?” said Willard.

“I'd like to have her—yes.”

“Sit down and have a cup of coffee and a muffin after this early journey. I must be off for a few hours' work. Can't we go somewhere after lunch?”

“I'm going to take Helen home early. But then, you know, we will be down next week.”

“We want to stuff her full of pleasure, enough to last until Easter. Adieu, until we meet again.”

They persuaded Shirley to go with them.

Helen came around to Mrs. Bell presently.

“I haven't had any visit with you. I've longed for you so much! I want comforting and maybe setting straight. I've gone to Rome—you remember how you told me about St. Paul once. I hoped to do some fine thing and I do not seem to have made any headway.”



“There was the tent-making, you know. I dare say it was irksome. And he wrote some Epistles. The tents wore out long ago. He was proud of supporting himself with the labor of his hands. And the Epistles are alive to-day, cheering and helping thousands. It was not just the Rome he wanted, but I suppose God knew best,” smiling and kissing her.

The stores were crowded, of course. They managed to get most of the things they wanted, then went home to a late lunch. Helen would spend the next Sunday with the Bells—but she must return Tuesday night.

“I want you a whole month!” cried Shirley.

“Oh, my dear, your love is a very precious thing.”

“And I’m not jealous of anybody in the land!” appended Shirley, with a rapturous embrace.

The wind was blowing up cold and the cloudiness made the short winter day seem shorter. But oh! how delightful it was in the house, with the log fire burning on the hearth and the merry voices of welcome at Juliet’s home! Two tall, fair girls, pretty with youth



and health, girlishly attired, with skirts at ankle length and hair still in braids came to greet them. Elma was a little smaller every way. They seemed mysteriously outgrowing their twinship. The little cherub, still called "baby," had hardly changed an atom and was overflowing with joyous affection for every one when not seized with a sudden fit of shyness.

"What was Miss Grant's school like?" Elma wanted to know, and as they sat round the fire, the baby in Juliet's lap, Helen described the more attractive features of it, and the grammar department with crowds of younger children, the play and work of the kindergarten, and tried to recall amusing incidents. They hovered around her and escorted her to the dining table, told her their girlish hopes and experiences, and hated to leave her for the night.

"You are really very happy in your new work?" assumed Juliet when they were alone.

"I don't know, truly. That's queer, too, isn't it? It seems now as if there must have been many pleasant things, looking back at it,



but much of it has been trying in the passing. I don't know that the girls are any cruder or more immature than one might expect, than first year college girls, and they have gone through all these experiences. Only it seems so much surface life to me, as if you didn't get down to the heart of anything. But I've quite fallen in love with one boy who is going to make a fine scholar. I like his parents also. And he is a gentleman by instinct. Some of them are so boorish. I'm not sure but teaching two or three specialties would be more agreeable, only I felt rather too young to undertake the things I liked best. I can tell by the close of the year whether I have made a mistake or not. And I shall have plenty of time to rectify it," she laughed. "Now, let us talk of something else. Are you in love with your work still?"

"In earnest with the work, and charmed with the many fine and noble people one meets. It broadens one's views of life, of the work needed in the world, of the many, many souls and bodies to be saved."

Helen studied her by the ruddy blaze of the



fire. How fine and strong her face had grown! Her hair was darker, she was not so nearly of one color, there was so much spirit and so much tenderness in the lines. What a woman she was making! Was it not in part the advantages of the fortune? Lilian Firth could never attain to that, yet sometimes she had thought of the unpromising girlhood of both. Love had narrowed instead of ennobling Miss Firth, she was not of the stuff that such experiences shape to better things.

“Have you kept track of Miss Logan and her roommate?” she asked, remembering another unpromising case.

“Oh, yes. They have a delightful home and Miss Logan gives fortnightly teas that are really unique, asking in people who seldom have opportunities for refined society; clerks and office girls. And she has a reading club. You can’t think how truly fond of poetry most of them are; of the sweet, simple little things that touch the ordinary experience. So I think the minor poets do a good work. And Miss Kent has a nice practice, is really invaluable to poor mothers. She had an offer of marriage



not long ago from a young doctor who had not succeeded very well, and who, I suppose, found the home tempting."

"And she declined it," subjoined Helen in a mirthful tone. "I can fancy it."

"Yes. And he said some disagreeable things about her that might have hurt her practice if she had not been so firmly intrenched in her patients' hearts. In the end it injured him. And now I have sent them a poor little girl, who was hurt by a kick from a drunken father and the injury has settled into a kind of hip complaint. I wanted to pay for her, but Miss Logan would not hear of it. How much good work women are doing in the world! That makes me recall your Miss Carr. How does she prosper?"

An odd smile flitted over Helen's face.

"It is hard work for her, but she is really trying. She has found some absolute prosperity without having to skimp. She can save some money and dress decently. She tells me about her two new gowns as if they were wonders. I am glad she had the courage to get them. And she is tutoring two backward girls



four evenings a week, which brings her in some money, to her delight. She is studying up in higher branches as well. I hope some day she will reach the spring of her life; it has been all autumn so far."

"What a pity! Why can't people see how glad life can be made when it touches other lives?"

"And if you could only know Miss Hetty Gould, who is seventy-one, you would see perpetual spring. To be sure, those people have never known the real grind of poverty. I dare say it would make a difference."

Juliet sighed, thinking of the countless lives in which it did. But one could not raise the whole, and many cared only for food and shelter and idleness.

"You are always finding such piquant people. And that Mr. Hildreth?"

"I have something to tell about him. He has gone to visit Professor Yarrow and his wife, *and* the baby," laughing. "He is deeply interested in girls. He wants to see yours, and the baby, and he will be back on Wednesday. Then he is going to New York. He is a good



friend, a sort of father friend that one feels comfortable with. The high school is the idol of his very soul. I do believe he prays night and morning for its success, and several times a day," in a merry tone.

"Well, why shouldn't he? Why shouldn't we take a deep interest in the things we like? You do always, and also in the people you don't like."

"I have a tendency for making the world over. I'm not sure but it is the divine gift of youth, for I notice that most of the people are satisfied with it, or at least think they cannot help and cease to try. I wonder if I shall sometime reach the state of satisfaction, or a sort of disbelief in the regeneration of things. Oh, then I think I ought to die, that I would merely cumber the ground," said Helen earnestly.

"I think you ought to go to bed."

"Wood fires are a snare without being a delusion. You want to see how this stick burns to the end with a lot of dancing fairies skipping over it, when that one is going to break in the middle, and this poor one giving



up the ghost and turning to white ashes. I could sit and watch it all night."

"Not to-night, dear. Come. Save some talk for the next few days."

"Oh, you needn't think I have unloaded all my budget. I'm stuffed full," laughing with a good-night kiss.

It was a cold, clear, inspiriting Sunday. There was still considerable snow here, and the sleighbells stirred the air with a joyous sound. They all went to church in the morning. Baby had an admirable nurse, a young girl whose strength had given out after factory work of several years, making fine underwear and having a poor home where there were no real comforts. The child had grown very fond of her.

In the afternoon the twins were at Sunday school. They had made the acquaintance of several girls in the summer and they were longing to be included in the Christmas festivities.

"I am glad to have them choose friends," said Juliet. "They will outgrow them and find they have made some mistakes, but it is better for them to learn a few things by an



experience of their very own. They were much alike at first, but I find they are developing quite different characteristics. They do not always think alike," smiling.

"I should be glad of that. Wilma is the stronger."

"Physically, yes."

"But she seems to plan and rule——"

"Elma tempers the ruling. She is not so easily taken, has more persistency and a clearer judgment. Sometimes I wish she were not quite so wise, but she is never aggressive about it. She has a sweet way of holding on, and it takes absolute experience to change her mind. Wilma changes hers in a very natural child-like fashion, without being convinced pro or con, but just because she wants to. She is a fervent adorer of beauty. One day she said—  
'Oh! I could not love baby half so much if she were not so beautiful. Don't you feel sorry that there are so many homely babies in the world?'"

"What an idea! Still it betrays a generous spirit. Have you ever heard anything about the stepmother?"



“You knew she married again,—an Englishman. She seems to have developed a taste for dramatic reading and is quite a favorite at those semi-private entertainments, and still writes some verses. A newspaper correspondent interviewed her for some weekly paper. She sends a small sum to the executor every year to buy a Christmas gift for the children. I am very glad she will never want them.”

“What a curious sort of woman! I can’t understand how Mr. Gartney came to marry her!”

“I think I do now that I have seen more of marriages. He thought her the very soul of her poetry, while she was only a vehicle for exquisite thoughts. People can express sentiments they do not feel deeply.”

“Oh, yes, there are plenty of surface people. What will you do with them presently?”

“Wilma has decided musical talents. I think I shall make that her specialty. I do not believe she will care to go to college. They will have a little money. I have insisted on its remaining at interest. I think a girl ought to have some specialty if she is thrown on her



own resources. But I hope they will both marry happily, it is the best life for the average woman."

"And *you* are not the average woman," laughed Helen, but there was an admiring sound in it.

"I am steward of a God-given estate that I must use wisely," she answered gravely.



## CHAPTER XII

### AN AFTERMATH

THERE were letters and letters on Monday morning. The children were eager that Cousin Helen should go and help trim the Christmas tree. They had decided to have one at home and receive their gifts from that.

“And their real Christmas treat is to be a visit to New York. Do you remember the nice time they had with Mrs. Howard’s brother-in-law? He came up and made us a little visit the last of vacation and has taken a great fancy to the children, and asks that they may come the last of the week and give him two days. I shall put the note on the tree as a surprise for them.”

“Why, that is jolly, as the boys say. And Mr. Hildreth writes that he should be glad to make us a good long call on Wednesday, as he is to be in New York after that to attend to some business. He has been having a splendid



visiting time with Professor Yarrow and the family, and has to admit that the mother hasn't overpraised the baby. If she were older he would like to adopt her. Think of that!" and a merry light danced in her eyes. "Then Leslie and Miss Morse are to come; Mr. Morse also. Why, we shall have a regular party! I shall be doubly glad to see Leslie. And Miss Morse as well!"

"Why, this looks like a grand holiday!"

"Is it a premonition of second childhood when elderly men begin to like girls so much?" Helen asked laughingly.

"It sits quaintly on Mr. Howard. Even I like him extremely. One can enjoy so much when there is no thought of marrying."

"Juliet, you are certainly marked out for single blessedness."

"Then I hope it will be blessedness. Life holds so much more than I can use and enjoy that I must pass it on to others."

"Cousin Helen, the sleigh is here and we have been packing in the things. Will you come?"

"Send the sleigh back and I will come down



with the lunch. Oh, some word must be sent to Mr. Hildreth!" glancing earnestly at Helen.

"Oh, you do it, please. You are the hostess. You may say 'we,' " with a bit of mischief in her tone.

There were quite a number of girls and several women putting up Christmas greens. There would be service in the morning. At three the church would be lighted up, the carols sung, and the gifts distributed. The tree stood in the corner and would be screened by an arrangement of fir and hemlock branches.

They had a merry time putting on tinsel and balls and long strings of popcorn. And as they hung on the gifts one lady made a list of them so they could be easily called off. Most of them were wrapped in crêpe paper napkins, and the colored edges looked like flowers in bloom. How eagerly they all worked! Then Miss Craven came with some sandwiches and cake and they had quite a feast.

After that the débris was swept up, the chancel and the pew-rails dusted, one and another said good-by in that hopeful, half-merry tone that presaged future delight. They took



two other girls and packed into the sleigh, flying off with the exultant heart of happy youth. The sun was going over westward rapidly and the crimson and golden lights crept slowly up in the sky to fade to pale yellow.

"I think it will be a fine day to-morrow," Miss Craven said.

But it was delightful to enter the warm room with the cheerful blaze and the lights, and they all brought home good appetites for their dinner. Afterward they practised carols. What a beguiling picture of home life it was! Nothing could be happier, Helen thought. She wondered if Lilian Firth was having a good time in her old home, and what Miss Carr found for herself in the feast. Oh, were they keeping it at Hope with warmth, if not as a great festival? She had sent the dearest friends a little gift. She never forgot them.

There were only simple reminders the next morning. Juliet had asked two of her neighbors in to dinner: a widow, who had lately lost her husband, and another who had a rather grudging home with a cousin, but was hardly esteemed as one of the family. It was a fes-



tival indeed to them and they gave thanks in broken tones.

Then there was an hour of supreme pleasure for the children, who went home laden with budgets and hearts full to overflowing.

"It's queer, Aunt Juliet, but here is a letter directed to both. And it looks a little like your handwriting, only coarser. Which of us ought to open it?" asked Wilma.

"You are the biggest," but Elma looked with longing eyes.

"Why, isn't it queer! Only just a letter. Why, it's from Uncle Howard!" He had asked the girls to call him that.

"Oh! isn't this splendid! Aunt Juliet, did you know? If you or grandma will bring us to New York, he would like to entertain us two whole days and take us about. Oh! can we go?"

Wilma flung herself down beside Miss Craven in a tremor of delight. "Oh! could we go?" she cried.

Mrs. Howard smiled. She wished her grave, self-contained brother-in-law could be here to see the joy he had conferred.



"Why, I do not see anything in the way. If grandma will care for you a little and see that you are properly attired and all that. I shall go, too."

"Why, it will be a family party!" Wilma sprang up and pirouetted round the room, snatching up the baby, who clapped her hands gleefully as if included. "And we shall be like real young ladies, with an attendant. Can we choose where we shall go? I am just crazy to see an opera."

"I suppose Uncle Howard has a list of pleasures for young girls, but perhaps he might consent to the opera if there was a suitable one," said Juliet.

"I'm going to make a list," began Elma. "I'll put the things I want to see most at the head, but it shall be long enough to leave some out if I have to, and still have those I want. Two whole days of pleasure!"

"As if you never had any pleasure before," interposed Helen with amusement.

"But this is different, a sort of grown-up——"

"Are you very anxious to be grown up?"



"Sometimes, and then sometimes not."

"I don't want to be grown up for a good long while!" exclaimed Elma. "I have so much to do before that time."

"There is a gentleman coming presently who is quite desirous of making your acquaintance," announced Helen. "He isn't as old as Uncle Howard, but he is very nice," smiling.

"Has he any girls?"

"Neither girls nor boys. He has a large and very nice house, and lives there all alone with a housekeeper."

"Why, it must be awfully lonesome. Why doesn't he find some one to take in, like Aunt Juliet?"

"I guess he has never found just what he wanted," and Helen looked amused.

"Aunt Juliet could find him some. But then he couldn't mother a baby, could he?"

They all laughed at that.

It was just after luncheon when the sleigh from the station drove up. Helen was at the window and waved her hand in answer to Mr. Hildreth's courtly bow. Miss Craven gave him a welcome greeting, and in a few moments



he was at home and they were all chatting merrily. He had enjoyed the visit at the Yarrows' extremely, he and the Professor had taken in a very fine educational reunion. Mrs. Yarrow was the same delightful person and the little daughter was healthy and happy and good. He had taken dinner with President Jordan and a few other guests, and the president was quite anxious to hear about Miss Grant, and Professor Blake asked innumerable questions. "And I saw you had been paid a lovely compliment. Mrs. Yarrow had received a beautiful volume of poems, exquisite poems, too. And I think you must have been the inspiration," turning to Helen with a smile that had no little pride in it.

Helen flushed warmly. "It was a great surprise to me," she returned. "They kept their secret admirably, and I really do not see how either of them did it," a happy smile illumining her face.

"President Jordan is delighted, and sent her a letter of congratulation. He is proud of girls who distinguish themselves. There was a Miss Mabury—can you recall her?"



"Yes, she is in the seniors this year. Her strong point was sociology."

"And it seems she won a prize of a hundred dollars for the second best article on the subject. He mentioned that with a great deal of enthusiasm."

*She* would never do anything beyond "honorable mention." For a moment she felt almost jealous.

"Now that I have shaken my budget of college news for your benefit," he said presently, "I am going to ask Miss Craven for some entertainment. Miss Grant and I have discussed your happy family and I am very much interested in the kind of work you have been doing, though somehow I never found quite the way to take up much of it myself. People in small towns get rather narrow and think mostly of their own surroundings; whatever is of benefit to them."

"But if all the smaller towns were roused to improvement even among themselves there would be a great deal of good work done."

"True. The smaller towns need broadening out and they ought to plan to keep their



young people more at home; make their lives more interesting, and give them some real advancement. And sometimes to rescue a few from the over-crowded cities. Oh, I have many fine theories," a smile lighting up his face. "I can't quite tell where the lack is."

"But you have done a great deal, your neighbors say. You should not disparage yourself," returned Helen warmly. "They owe the first steps of the library to you, and Mr. Underwood considers you the corner stone of educational advancement."

"Some years ago I had been making journeys around in second- and third-rate cities, and returned to feel positively ashamed that we had no library. Yes, I did go to work and rouse up our people, and now they wonder how they lived without it. We have a very good morning paper, a most excellent evening sheet that does lay claim to some intellectuality. But now and then I do get hungry for outside enjoyments. And after understanding the broad college life Miss Grant has enjoyed, I do give her a great deal of credit for not being positively homesick."



There was a touch of appreciation in his face that went to her heart.

They sauntered through the cozy library.

"You see, I didn't fit it all up at once," Miss Craven explained. "The charm of a home is the pleasure of adding things you come to need and that make life richer for you. Then there is no satiety."

"You have a lovely home. Can I see its inmates as well?"

Mrs. Howard came in with the children. Elma was rather shy at first, but the guest soon interested them. Helen was surprised that he could do it so easily.

"Then there is a wonderful baby, I have understood. My last few days' experience has quite interested me in the future young people who are to be our men and women some day."

"Oh, let me get her!" cried Wilma. "She is the most beautiful thing you ever saw!"

"It may be thought that I chose her for that," said Miss Craven, "but in her friendless state it really was a dangerous endowment."



There was no one to whom she could turn, but then there are many of them in homes who would die in the street but for the kindly shelter. Yet they do need real homes and the training of some one wise enough to take them to a motherly heart. It is a risk, of course, when you know nothing about their antecedents, or what you do know would better be blotted out and forgotten."

There was a suggestion of wisdom in the tone that was quite unusual in so young a woman, he thought. Helen told her that she grew younger every year, and if it was not all in her face it was in her heart. Her own lonely childhood had made her clear-sighted for others. No one had pitied her, but the pity and love had grown in her heart as soon as she knew what it really was.

Yes, the child was beautiful, and daintily sweet. She had been tossed from one to the other and knew none of the fear of a more strictly nurtured child. She went to Mr. Hildreth and sat on his knee, and chatted as if she had always known him.

"I sometimes wonder if she will ever have



any real preferences," Mrs. Howard occasionally said.

Then Mr. Hildreth looked at his watch.

"My train will be along presently," he began. "I left word for the man to call for me."

"Oh!" exclaimed Helen disappointedly.

"I must be at a dinner to-night, at a meeting of a board of directors to-morrow, and at an election the next day where there is likely to be a stormy time. Do you remain here all the rest of the year?" in a rather mirthful tone.

"The rest of the year!" Then she laughed with a merry ring. "We are going to New York as well—a family party."

"Are you? Then I shall hope to see you. I am the bearer of so many messages to that pretty Mrs. Bell that I am almost afraid they will turn her head. Miss Craven," and he held out his hand, "I want to thank you for your delightful hospitality, and I hope I shall be able to return it. You must come and see Miss Grant in the midst of her kingdom, where she makes an admirable ruler. I do appreciate



your work, and all work tending to the betterment of the world. There are some things a woman is especially fitted for, and in which some women, not all I am sorry to say, seem born to lead. May I say good-by to your young girls? Shall I really see all of you in New York?"

"That is quite certain," and Juliet smiled as she spoke.

"We will continue our talks there," he said to Helen.

They waved him a last adieu as the horses pranced down the driveway.

"Oh, Cousin Helen, don't you like him very, very much? He is handsomer than Uncle Howard, and his voice is so—so, well, I don't just know what you would call it, only you'd like to hear him go on talking always. And does he live all alone? Why doesn't he adopt a lot of folks and have nice times with them?" in an eager tone.

"I do not believe he has thought of it. Then he is away from home quite often, and I do not think men can do it as successfully as women."



"Why doesn't he get married then? There would be a real mother for them then."

"I think he is too busy."

Wilma flew to Juliet and clasped her about the waist with an energetic hug.

"But we don't want you to marry, Auntie Jue. You are just right as you are. And when we are through school we shall never go away from you."

Juliet bent and kissed her fondly. Once she had said to her,—“Oh, I wish papa had never married again. We were so happy. I think the new mamma never loved us and didn't want him to, and that was why she sent us to school.”

The child's eyes had seen, the girl's heart understood.

It was indeed a family party that went to the city the next day. Juliet hugged the baby fondly to her heart. Would she ever grow to love her as the twins had done? She laughed now and said good-by merrily. She was so used to seeing her protectress go on journeys.



Helen was to stay with Shirley, the others went to a quiet hotel.

"I am so glad to get you back!" cried Shirley. "Though we had a lovely family time and they wanted to keep mother, but I said no, for you were coming again and it had been only half a visit. And what do you think? A note from Mr. Hildreth, who is going to give himself the pleasure of spending the evening with us, as he has no end of messages to deliver from all the college people. Helen, I feel like a fraud! All this glory for a few verses any one could have written."

"Not any one," returned Helen. "I couldn't."

"But you made me put some of them in proper shape. How good you always were to me, dear. And to think—I should really be ashamed to tell any one that I was two years getting out of the freshmen class and barely squeezed through, it *was* shameful, wasn't it?"

"But you read and translated Latin beautifully, you were a good French scholar. You could have gone in the seniors on your French,



and your Italian was charming. You will know enough."

"We are going to study, Willard and I, but there has been the book and there are so many lovely things to read. Oh, there are some visitors to spoil our nice talk, for when mother is through with her rest, she will want you."

There was not any one to spoil it. Miss Morse and her brother and Leslie.

"Why, it is really old friends met together!" declared Helen. "I think my happiness is complete. Oh, Leslie! how lovely it is to see you again! And you are very happy—it shines in your eyes."

"Happy at seeing you," with an evasive laugh.

"And I've heard fresh news about the dear old college. Mr. Hildreth was there."

"And were not the presents lovely? Why, Shirley was quite a star. And you remember that Miss Newton, who wrote some fine stories for a magazine and went into the office of a monthly? She has been publishing a novel. College stock is away up!"



"Tell me about some of the other girls. How is Miss Powers doing?"

"Finely. And Betty Garnier plays ball and runs races and golfs when there is time, and studies just as hard as she does everything else. But you can't think how the girls are interested in the baby at the Yarrows'! They are converted to marriage instead of careers. And your friend Miss Craven's beautiful baby?"

"It is beautiful and sweet. But I want to know about you, *you*. Of course all is right?"

"It couldn't be otherwise unless it came utterly to grief, or God took it from me. It grows more sweet and sacred. Oh, Helen—I hope some day you will love some one worthy of you and know the exquisite joy, the blessedness of looking forward to a life and a work together! I am not fitted for it, I know, but he is so comforting in his large faith, in his serene and inspiring trust."

The others were deep in Shirley's venture, and did not heed the two down at the end of the room. Mr. Morse said they had the ring of true poetry in their simplicity.



Then Mrs. Bell joined them and the conversation was general.

Where could they meet the next day? Miss Morse wanted to go to the Natural History Rooms.

"Let us all meet there then!" exclaimed Helen. She caught Miss Morse's hand. "I want a good talk with you," she said with shining eyes.

In the evening it was all over again, to Willard's great delight. Mr. Hildreth made himself very charming.

"If he only wasn't so much older!" sighed Shirley. "I am sure he likes Helen more than ordinary."

"Helen is all right as she is for years to come," said Willard. "And he is too old."

Mr. Hildreth said with his good-night, "I will try to get up for an hour or two to-morrow," and he noted that it brought a flush of pleasure to Helen's face.

They had a very enjoyable time, first with the Morse party, later with the others.

Miss Morse and Helen strayed off together. The elder woman was interested to know how



it had fared with the girl, and Helen recounted some of her perplexities.

"My dear, it has been a hard place for you to fill. A woman of more experience should have been selected until it was better organized. It will be a difficult thing to get the classes up to regular standing. Another year there will be some vacancies in our teaching staff. Do you not want to come back?"

"Oh, that is a temptation!" the girl sighed. "Leslie will be——" and she paused.

"They will be married late in June and take a two months' tour to London."

"Oh, Miss Morse! You were to live with him and keep house for him. Will you never——" Oh, no! such a woman could never be jealous.

"That was a youthful dream. We both had to struggle somewhat for our education. And now I have reached a nice position and a good salary. I can lay by something every year, 'if no one comes to marry me,'" quoting with laughing eyes. "It would be a wild, useless thing to throw up my opportunity since he does not truly need me. But we talk about it,



or have, as brother and sister dear to each other often do, building air castles. But I really wanted him to marry, when the right woman came within his orbit. A clergyman, of all men, ought to be careful in this respect. A woman of the suitable kind can be a true helpmate, another may mar his work. His wife is differently placed from other women. Leslie has a rare quality, you may have remarked it, of setting one at ease with a cordiality that is not obtrusive nor yet promising too much, but winning, heartfelt."

"Oh, it charmed me the first time I met her. She took me in hand with friendliness, so much to a stranger in a strange place. No, she is not gushing, either," with a responsive smile.

"It will stand her in good stead as a clergyman's wife. And her principles are so high and firm, he will never drop down. You know we often pick out lovers and sweethearts for others. My choice lay between Leslie and you. Helen, I should have loved you fondly for a sister."

"Oh, this is much better!" cried Helen with all humility.



"We both thought you the beloved of another,—Willard Bell. I suppose you did not love him?"

"Not in that way." And then she recalled in her girlish fashion how she had measured the two men and found that in some high characteristics one distanced the other.

"Your turn will come some day. It is not wise to hurry these matters. Leslie will be a dear younger sister to me, and I shall always be welcome to their home. I do sincerely rejoice in the engagement, and I know they will be happy in doing the work God has set for them. See, there is some one signaling to you. Oh, it is Mr. Hildreth! I met him at Professor Yarrow's. What a fine strong man,—a gentleman!"

They waited for him to rejoin them and had a pleasant chat. Then they met Mr. Howard and two delighted girls. Mrs. Howard was chaperoning them. Miss Craven had gone to a meeting, of which she was secretary. Mr. Morse and Leslie rejoined them presently.

"What pretty, well-bred girls," Leslie said, "and so enthusiastic. They are growing out



of their shyness, but they do not betray the awkward age."

"No one could who was trained by Mrs. Aldred," said Helen. If she could do something like this for her girls!

They were going to a pretty, wholesome play that evening. Mr. Morse had secured four tickets for "The Messiah." Would not Helen go with them?

She would be very happy to.

"I want you for Saturday's matinée," said Mr. Hildreth afterward. "I have enjoyed your friends very much. I shall venture to call them mine hereafter. But I want a little bit of you for myself, to recall sometime when I sit alone. The opera is 'Lohengrin,' and there are three exceptionally fine singers in it."

Helen flushed with pleasure. "I shall be very glad to go," she exclaimed eagerly.

And it was delightful to sit quietly and glance up now and then to find him enjoying the same fine acting, or the glorious strain in the music. Every thing had seemed to be a little crowded. There were sweet and heart-felt talks with Leslie, who was looking for-



ward not only to a life of happiness but usefulness as well. The training of her busy girl life had confirmed her in habits of industry; she could not have spent hours in light and careless dreaming even if the dreams were sweet.

Juliet had taken the girls home this afternoon. They had enjoyed a most fascinating time.

"I am glad they are going back to school or they would grow up altogether too fast, at least Wilma would. She does go so to the heart of everything. I only hope she will not exhaust the delights and have none left for womanhood. I keep finding new things all the time," smiling.

So Helen had said good-by to them. The Morse party were to go early on Monday.

"For I want a feast day on Sunday, listening to my brethren who have a surfeit of riches in this wonderful city," said Mr. Morse. "And then I shall distribute gladly, and try to give my people a taste of these good things."

Helen would be glad to have a quiet day with her dear Mrs. Bell, if she were allowed, she put in a sort of mental parenthesis.



But now she dismissed all other thoughts and just devoted her soul to the mysterious sway of the music. Mr. Hildreth watched the face so instinct with understanding, not mere sensuous delight. How replete life would be with breadth and fineness if she were in the place of her rich friend! Not but what Miss Craven's life would be blest, and blessing all those about her, and make many hearts happy. Perhaps it would be nobler, no, it could hardly be that, but there was such a vigorous growth to this girl, there was a vivid life in the very atmosphere about her.

"Oh!" she cried, in her full rich voice tremulous with emotion. "I want to thank you so much! I like some one who does not want to talk at such a time, but just listen and let the melody permeate every fiber of his or her being. And though you have heard it many times, I dare say, you are capable of making it seem fresh to yourself, and that gratified me."

He smiled. It was exquisite to be so well understood.

When they left the trolley there was a short distance to walk.



"I am going back to-night," Mr. Hildreth said. "My holiday is over. Are you?"

"On Monday. The first day of the new year I shall devote to getting settled. I feel as if I had been in an enchanted country."

He felt the smile in her voice.

"I hope you have had a happy time, a time to remember. I shall come in to wish you a Happy New Year."

Then they shook hands lingeringly and parted.



## CHAPTER XIII

### EFFORTS FOR BETTERMENT

MRS. STIRLING came to the door herself to greet Helen, and took both of her hands in a warm clasp.

"I've been so lonesome!" she exclaimed. "I did not suppose I could miss you so much. Lilian came back on Thursday and a day or two after she said, 'Why, Aunt Emma! it seems as if there had been a funeral in the house!' We're so glad to have you again!"

"Thank you fifty times over for the warm welcome!" Helen returned with deep feeling.

"Come in the sitting-room and let Jane take your hat and coat upstairs. We can't spare you a moment, lest you may vanish. Lilian, here she is."

The girl came from the kitchen and shook hands warmly.

"It's been the longest two weeks of all my life!" she declared. "I thought of you every



day and hour. Oh, Miss Grant! I wouldn't go back there to live unless there was no other shelter in the whole wide world!"

Her eyes were shining with tears, but her lips smiled in a quivering fashion.

Oh, how delightful it was to have such a welcome! There was a savory fragrance of supper. They put her in the easy chair and looked as if they could hardly believe the fact.

Jane, too, had a word of gladness.

"You look rested and brighter," commented Mrs. Stirling.

"I've had such a grand, good time that I should be ashamed of my ingratitude if I did not show some benefit. I've seen some of my dearest friends, and been about to so many splendid things, pleasures, that I almost forgot I was a schoolma'am," laughing. "Yet I am ready to take it up again."

"Are you, really?" Lilian looked incredulous.

"One would get tired of pure pleasure. At least there would be satiety."

"I'd like to have enough to get tired of it," returned the girl.



“Oh, no! I do not believe you would. It would cease to be a pleasure.”

Then supper was ready and they had a most delightful time sitting around the table afterward. Jane declared “there was no hurry, she had all the night before her,” and Helen made no move because she knew Jane liked to listen as she went in and out.

“We are real selfish,” Mrs. Stirling began presently. “There are some Christmas gifts upstairs that came after you were gone.”

“But please don’t stay up there,” interposed Lilian.

“No, I’ll just stop a few moments.”

It was warm and pleasant, and everything was in order. There on her table was a red geranium in bloom, from Allen Millard. Letters with small gifts, calendars, two very pretty framed pictures. How the remembrances had gone on! She would have enjoyed sitting there in a half-dreamful way, but she knew they were counting on her and went down, taking some of the gifts with her.

They had a little of the Westfield news to give her. One pretty church wedding, several



girls' parties. The Christmas fair for the library had done very well and Mr. Hildreth had added fifty dollars to the amount. Georgia Winters had another poem in the paper. The Hendersons had all moved in and seemed very nice and neighborly, people said.

They were still old-fashioned enough to have a few social calls on New Year's day. Two of the clergymen, a number of the older gentlemen, Mr. Hildreth, who remained quite a while, and Mr. Underwood in the evening.

"You will have quite an influx of new scholars," he announced. "Four of the Henderson household for you, two for us. Then Mrs. Waite has a niece for you who has been sent to her care. And a lad who left the grammar school a year ago, thinking he would like business, has decided to try a little more education. He is a nice lad, too. I was sorry to have him give up, but you see we had no high school then."

"I'm glad of the increase. I wish there were twice as many."

"We will have two or three unsatisfactory days getting settled. We always do after holi-



days, but after that I trust all will go on smoothly. I thought you might get—what is it Southerners say?—tolled away from us with all your New York gayeties. I'm glad to see you looking so well and—energetic," laughing.

"I should be a poor sort of soldier if a holiday upset me," rather mirthfully.

In the evening an old gentleman who had known the Stirling family from his boyhood, and loved to talk them over in his prosy fashion, came in for his periodical call.

"Let us go upstairs," Lilian said in a whisper. "Mr. Williams will talk for a good hour. Aunt Emma feels rather sorry for him and is real kind. But they don't need us."

They stole out quietly and went up to the cheerful room where Jane had lighted the lamp.

"Now you are to sit here, and I'm going to take this ottoman, so. Shall I bore you if I talk?"

There was something new in the girl's face, and a sort of assured note in her voice instead of the dissatisfaction that often crept into it.



"No, I want to hear you. Did you have a nice time at home?" and she placed her hand caressingly on the shoulder.

"No, not very. Miss Grant—one can change without being capricious or wavering in mind, can they not?"

"We are always changing somewhat, growing wiser. That is what experience is for, if we mean to profit by it," she answered encouragingly.

"I've changed so much in this little while that I hardly know myself. And I wouldn't go back to live in that narrow, gossipy, dull little town again for anything. I didn't imagine it was so—well, so benighted. Was I very foolish and conceited when I first came here? I thought I knew a great deal."

Helen had known foolish, conceited, and arrogant girls in the freshmen class, but most of them had it rubbed out of their minds.

"Oh, I think you were very fair for a country girl with **limited** experience."

"And I want to say before I forget it, that the new teacher sent in her resignation the first of December. The salary was too small and





"SHALL I BORE YOU IF I TALK?" — *Page 307.*







she did not like the place. Then another one came while I was there and wouldn't accept it."

Lilian laughed with a certain satisfaction.

"It is difficult to fill such places."

"Brother thinks I could come back. What is the use of all the high-up requirements when you do not have to teach any of them? And it is so nice here with Aunt Emma. I think I didn't half appreciate it before I went home. It seems so much more refined not to live in your kitchen, and have pretty dishes that are not chipped all about the edges, and silver knives and forks. Oh, I am silly! Please don't despise me," in a pleading tone.

"No, I am not going to. I know how it appealed to me when I was only a little girl. It is the advance we make in refinement, so long as we keep out vanity."

"And then the talk—well, it isn't real conversation. Who has some new clothes, who has caught a beau, what girl has 'cut out' another, and such petty commonplace subjects. There is something better. The clergyman preached such a nice sermon on Sunday, but no one seemed to heed it a bit. Before they



were outside the church they began the same old topics."

It had not been quite so bad as that at Hope.

"I seemed to get converted from the error of my ways suddenly. I haven't been half grateful to you for the pains you have taken with me, nor the kindness Aunt Emma has shown. It was lovely in her to offer me a home and give me a chance for more education. I am going to try now and show you both how much I appreciate it. I suppose if I had gone on there—but I didn't like being laughed at because I had lost my lover. I should not have noticed all these things. And—I saw him in church the first Sunday. It seems queer that I should have liked him so well and felt so wretched about his defection. Oh, Miss Grant, he has a dull, common sort of face, and he is awkward and shuffles along in his walk! And they think, some of them, that Mary Gates didn't get any great thing in getting him. Brother always said he was stupid and lazy. I do think brother has more sense and judgment than some of the men. And Mary says they do not get on very well together, and that I was



a lucky girl not to have him saddled on me. I think so now."

Lilian laughed softly from a heart that had been quite healed of its wound.

"I am very glad you can feel this way," said Helen with her whole heart.

"I can't imagine what blinded me so. And he takes so little care of himself. He looks—well, that word 'unkempt' expresses it. His hands and nails are not clean, though I do think he has dropped down. I believe men in country places do after they are married. And I'm all out of love. I do not think I shall mind if I do not get married. And now I am going to study and be like a daughter to Aunt Emma. She was glad to get me back, but oh! not half as glad as I was to come."

Lilian's eyes shone with unwonted affection as she raised them to Helen.

"My dear girl, I am more glad than I can express at this change of mind," smiling. "I dare say it is an experience that comes to a great many girls who really do outgrow their earlier associations."

"And you don't think me mean for going



back on the old things? I do believe I appreciate my brother more than ever before, and he seemed so pleased that I had such a nice home with Aunt Emma. Mary laughed and hoped I wouldn't get so 'stuck up'—that is a real country phrase—that I would look down on them. She is good and sensible, but she doesn't really care for the niceties of life. There! Mr. Williams has gone, and you must be tired, so I won't bother you any longer."

She rose, but looked at Helen with a sweet, wistful adoration, and said again impulsively—"I'm so glad to be here! Oh! you do not know *how* glad! Good-night."

Helen sat half smiling, half wondering. She had thought her rather weak about her lover. She could not imagine what the heart of a girl must be like who could long for a lover who had been won away by a better prospect. She had heard it of girls, but it seemed so unmanly, so dishonorable, after a profession of love for another. After all the environment *did* count for a good deal. She thought of her Cousin Aurelia's husband, to whom Aunt Jane always applied the adjective "slack." There were



country youths—but Lilian had more education than most country girls and was really superior to them. She would have dropped down to his level. Now she could really make something of herself.

On the whole, Helen was glad to get back. She was interested in the problems of life and character and personal development. Newness appealed to her as well. She wanted to go on learning and doing and looking forward to something that the future would unroll in scroll-like fashion. It was all there. It is in the first quarter century when hope and ambition are new.

School was devoted to preliminaries the opening day. Most of the scholars showed great gladness in their welcome. There were the four Hendersons: Mark, a big, fair, fresh-faced boy with a rather jolly expression. A very fair scholar she found him and well-mannered, paying her a deference that would be an example to some of the others. Nina and Meta, going on to fifteen, had not as much twinship about them as the Gartneys. One was fair with blue eyes, the other quite dark,



and Nina looked really older. Vesta Coursen was about the same age, a thin, shy, nondescript sort of a girl, who blushed painfully when Miss Grant spoke to her, but she found her quite well informed in a desultory sort of fashion. Then there was Honor Bain, a bright and quite pretty girl, whose greatest defect seemed a strident kind of voice not pleasant to hear. Archie Varick she took to at once; he had a rosy face with mirthful-looking eyes and a cleft chin that was his abomination.

Again Helen exhorted them to prepare for the mid-winter examination, as then there would be a sort of re-organization.

She found that Dick Eastman still kept the lead over the older boys. She took no note of his supercilious manner toward her, but she saw with a secret joy that Mark Henderson had some of the characteristics of a leader as well. She rather deprecated cliques, but she thought a new one might serve a useful purpose if it was in opposition to Eastman.

There was some quite vigorous studying and more pains taken with the written exercises.



The new girls were very much in earnest about their standing.

Katherine Ford and Althea Barber began to discuss the club again. There had been so much gayety while there was no school. They laid the plans before the Henderson girls.

"But what will it be for?" inquired Nina.

"Didn't you have them at school? They do in colleges."

"Some of the girls belonged to the Christian Endeavor."

"Oh! I don't mean that!" impatiently.

"There was the History Club," interposed Meta, in a rather soothing tone. "They wrote remarkable facts and incidents in an exercise book and then made exchanges."

"I mean just for fun. To meet—well, we'd go to each other's houses and make fudge and chocolate, and tell funny stories,—and discuss other girls," she was going to say, but checked herself. "Surely you girls must have gone to each other's rooms after the lights were out, and had some fun."

"Well, you know it was forbidden," explained Meta. "We could visit a girl and



study or talk, but we were to leave her at nine. At half-past, lights were to be put out. The girls, at least some of them, grumbled at having to go to bed so early. Twice a week we stayed down in the parlor and talked or sang and had some quadrilles. Then we went to bed half an hour later. There were two girls who thought they wouldn't. I don't see what real fun it was. They had some nuts and sweets and they did it several times. One night Miss Crane tried the door and commanded Carrie Green to open it. Carrie pushed Marty Hanson in the closet, and swept the refreshments off the table. 'Whose voice was that I heard talking?' asked Miss Crane, and Carrie looked up innocently and said she was studying aloud. 'If you would improve your study periods there would be no need of staying up at night,' Miss Crane said. 'Put out your light and go to bed.' She pretended to and turned out the gas. Then they waited a while until it was all dark in the corridor. Marty started and ran right into Miss Crane's arms. Of course she had to confess, and Carrie had to admit that she had told a falsehood. I wouldn't have



been in the place of either of the girls for a good deal, not for the little fun they had."

"They must have been awfully strict," said Althea, with a shrug of the shoulders.

"We had plenty of fun, too. Every day four girls were allowed to go down town and spend their pocket money, without any teacher. They were put on their honor, and if they misbehaved that was the end of the indulgence for that term. A girl flirted and corresponded with a young man and was sent home. I think it is best to keep straight."

Katherine, Althea, and Georgia walked home together. "I do believe I'm not going to like those Henderson girls," declared Althea. "They are too goody-goody for my use."

"The young fellow is a good skater and fond of fun. I was out with a lot of them last night," said Kate. "I am going to patronize him at any rate. Girls, I have an idea! Why can't we get up a whist club and meet round at each other's houses? You see it wouldn't be possible to get up any sort of school thing, un-



less there was some study motive in it. Goodness, we have enough of that!"

"Why, that's just splendid! We can have two tables,—eight, four of us and four boys. We'll give it a pretty name and keep it select. Now, who shall we choose for the fourth?"

"We could take in one Henderson. Oh! don't you think that niece kind of queer? She acts as if she was afraid of everybody."

"She was in some *pension* abroad. Her father died and she had to come here. Don't you suppose she's dependent on them, a sort of poor relation? And isn't a *pension* a kind of charity school?"

"I rather think it is. And she dresses so plainly, not a bit of style to her."

"Well, they're very good to her then."

"And there's that Honor Bain. You see there would be enough outside girls, but we want to keep it a sort of school thing and not take in any of the small fry."

"And we'll have Dick and Carl Benson. Oh, yes, and Larry."

"And Henderson. Dick will be around to-night and I'll get the thing settled with him.



Dick's having a first-class toboggan made. The coasting is just splendid!"

After some consideration Althea sounded Meta Henderson.

"Oh, we do play some at home, but I do not think mother would consent to either of us joining an evening club," she replied.

"But if your brother did?"

"Oh, boys seem so different."

"It is going to be *very* select. Just from the first families in town."

"Mark likes the outdoors sports so much. And he is studying with all his might and main. He likes Miss Grant immensely."

Althea gave a supercilious nod and there was the slightest curl of the lip.

"Don't you like her?" Meta asked a little more timidly.

"Oh, she's well enough for a teacher, I suppose," and there was a touch of disrespect in the tone. "Dick Eastman gives it to her now and then, and it's quite fun."

"But—about what?" in a surprised tone.

"Oh, she puts on such a lot of airs. And she coddles up the little girls so. I suppose she



really knows better how to teach them. But we who are up to her level in some things, and perhaps above it socially, know how to take her."

"But Miss Jaynes has the smaller children, the younger classes, I should say. Father and Mark were at Mrs. Stirling's, where she boards, the other evening. And father thinks her very capable. She's away up in chemistry and that's one of the things Mark wants. He means to be a professor of chemistry when he gets through college. And he's going to begin Greek with her."

There was a toss of the head and a curve of the lips that said plainly that Althea had not a very high opinion of the Greek Miss Grant could teach.

"Well," she returned, "I hope you will join the club. Meeting only on Friday evening it cannot distract us from our studies. And, as I said, we shall keep it very select and choose a pretty name, and just have congenial spirits. It's so much more agreeable to have girls all of one mind."

Meta was flattered by the preference. Still



she did not feel quite sure that she wanted to join. But if Mark did it would be pleasant.

So she laid the case before her mother.

"My dear child," said Mrs. Henderson, "I do not approve of it. You are too young. It is well enough for you children to play at home with your father, or if some friends come in, but this makes a regular business of it. And I dare say there will be prizes for which the members must spend their pocket money. The other girls are older and go about considerably, it seems. It will distract your attention. I like the out-of-door sports better for you children, and for the rest there are so many of you that you surely can find sufficient entertainment at home."

"I think I didn't care very much about it," returned Meta resignedly.

Mr. Henderson said nearly the same thing to Mark, but added,

"Some of those boys in the baseball club meet quite often and have been seen in the saloons. I want you to keep clear of them. The clubhouse is very well conducted, I hear, but it doesn't seem quite the place for boys. But



the saloons are detestable! I hope we can root some of them out. I have posted up notices in the factory that no beer shall be brought in during working hours, and any man shall be discharged who comes to work in a state of intoxication. I like Mr. Hildreth very much, and his views coincide with mine. We shall work together for a better state of things."



## CHAPTER XIV

### THE GROWTH AND BLOOM FIRST

THE small clique were quite disappointed at the defection of the Hendersons.

“There are plenty of outside girls, though, who will be glad enough to join,” said Miss Ford. “Those girls must have been to a very flat kind of a boarding-school or else they are very much in awe of their mother. Well, I have no one to be afraid of,” and Kate gave her head a toss.

Judge Ford was a widower and his sister kept house for him. He was proud of his stylish daughter, and took much of her imperiousness for decision of character.

The children were greatly engrossed with the coming examinations. The fernery had been a great interest to them, and watching their bulbs sprout another. Two strong hyacinths were shooting up rapidly and swelling out in the middle. Then there was sledding



and skating, and Miss Grant said that at college they learned to use snowshoes. Some of the boys were eager to make them.

Then the rating was announced and there were several of the grammar scholars promoted. Some of the older children decided they would come in for a year or two. The high school was beginning to be appreciated.

There was quite a reorganization of the classes, and not a little heart-burning among those who were not slated to come up higher.

"It really begins to look like business," Miss Grant said to Mr. Underwood. "See how the classes have filled up! Though we haven't any seniors," and a half-regretful, half-amused look flitted over her face as she lifted it with an arch expression.

"We couldn't in reason expect everything," he returned. "We began under unusual difficulties. Some of the examination papers were very clear and to the point. Miss Grant, I must congratulate you upon your executive ability and your discrimination. I was afraid at first that you couldn't hold such an incongruous lot. Those big boys have been hard to



manage. They are finding out that they do not know nearly as much as they imagined. I was truly sorry that two or three of them came, but their fathers are some of the influential men of the town, and there was quite an objection to the expense of a high school since there were two not very far away. Indeed, we should not have had it at all but for Mr. Hildreth, who has no children to send. Now we are on a really good, solid foundation and have lived down most of the opposition."

"But I thought—most people want their children educated——" she said, in a rather wondering tone.

"So they do. But I dare say by this time you have found that people's ideas are various. Now let us talk a bit of gossip," and he emphasized a half smile with a shrug of the shoulders. "What do you think of Georgia Winters' genius?"

Helen flushed scarlet, and her lips quivered.

"Her mother believes she will make a fine poet if she has the right kind of training and proper encouragement. What are *you* going to do about it? For if you quench this deli-



cate spiritual flame—or shall we call it spirituelle?—I am afraid you will be blamed.”

“I have wanted to talk to you about it. I haven’t encouraged it very much. It is the sort of verse that breaks out epidemic-like with young girls who have a tendency to sentiment and admiring friends who ask them to write on some special occasion. They are pretty thoughts strung together in poetic language, but there is no real genius to it. I do suppose it is a rather harmless experience, and marriage ends it. Indeed, that is the grave of much of the so-called genius.”

“If her mother did not make so much of it! She wrote on the death of Mrs. Lake’s baby and there was one quite fine verse that Mrs. Winters thought worthy of Tennyson’s ‘In Memoriam.’ Shades of poetry! Mrs. Winters believes she will reflect great credit on the school.”

“I wish she would pay a little more attention to her language lessons, logic, and the study of literature. She knows nothing about the higher class poetry and very little about the poets of the last century. Allen Millard goes



wild over Shakespeare, and is going back to Chaucer. I want a class in old English literature and then to come down to the Victorian era."

How bright and eager her face was, and so full of resolute endeavor! He gave a little sigh.

"Two or three years hence you may be able to achieve that. But you will be doing a good work to get them ready for it. That Archie Varick is a smart lad, though he will not take to the poets."

"But he has taken to physics and physiology and chemistry. He and Mark Henderson will make a good team. I hope Harry White will join them."

"You are enough to inspire one. I wish in my youth I could have had some one like you. But they were not teaching that way then."

"Oh, thank you!" Helen flushed with pleasure. She had never been quite sure of his entire approbation, and she was glad now to feel that she was truly working with him.

"But about the poet? You haven't advised



me what steps to pursue," and she gave a soft, irresolute laugh.

"Oh, you will have to let her go on. It will not do to offend her mother. Sometimes they learn by bitter experience and perhaps that is best."

She had talked over the Greek with Mark and given him a few lessons after school. Then his father said:

"That isn't quite fair, Mark. You had better ask Miss Grant to give you private lessons and pay her for them. Mr. Underwood thinks Latin is all they can reasonably take up this year, but they may later on take Greek."

"I wish you would go with me some night and call on her."

"My lad, I shall be very glad to. Mr. Underwood considers her an excellent teacher."

So it had come about. Miss Grant was really glad to see the father of such a flock of scholars, and Mark was proud of introducing him.

They talked a little of the boy's future. He was to go to college if he kept of the same mind.



“He has a great taste for chemistry, and it is an excellent profession. We need a great deal of that knowledge in many lines of business nowadays; if he doesn’t turn out a learned professor he can earn his living, and I think that is what every person ought to know how to do. I’m glad to have you take so much interest in him.”

“Isn’t that a true teacher’s endeavor?” and she glanced up in her bright fashion, with enthusiasm in her eyes. “And when one meets a pupil easily interested and capable of holding on, it is a really satisfying work.”

“You were in college, Mark tells me.”

“Oh, yes. I wouldn’t give up the remembrance of those four years for a great deal, even if I could have acquired as much knowledge elsewhere.”

Then they branched off into the true uses of education. Helen found him very intelligent and well read, interested in some things beyond mere money-making. He wanted his children to be fitted for the true work of life, to be of some use in the world. She had not



met with any one beside Mr. Hildreth that it was so delightful to talk to.

“Why, Mark! How we are staying!” he exclaimed at length. “Miss Grant, I am very glad to meet you in this manner and we have had a most agreeable and interesting talk. I want you to come and take dinner some night and meet Mrs. Henderson, who will be glad to make your acquaintance. We have been so busy—the house needed so much repairing though it is a fine old place, and we have no real company parlor yet. Then the business had to be recast, new machinery put in and all that. But we think we shall like the town very much. Mrs. Henderson will send you a special invitation,—I’m not much of a society man, so I don’t know all the nice little points. But you will surely come?”

“Oh, please do,” appended Mark in entreaty.

“I surely will, with the greatest of pleasure,” and her smile was a cordial assent.

When the two were out in the street Mark seized his father’s hand boyishly.

“Isn’t she a daisy!” he cried exultingly.



Mr. Henderson laughed as he replied, "I'm not a boy. They didn't call them daisies in my time."

"Well, she's splendid! And I can't see why the boys don't like her."

"Don't like her!" echoed his father in surprise. "I thought most boys were given to falling in love with a fascinating teacher. What cause have they? I think she might be decided. And so thorough a scholar would be likely to demand careful work."

"I do not believe they know themselves. Eastman sort of leads. He does things—well, they are kind of insolent, ill-bred. I feel as if I could kick him sometimes. He will pretend to misunderstand, he will ask a question when he must know the answer. And he will draw his face in a grotesque manner that will make some of the class laugh, or sneeze in the middle of a word. She takes no notice of these things, but it really does vex me when the boys, and some of the girls, too, talk as if she was only fit to teach little children. I do believe she is ahead of Mr. Underwood in mathematics. I'm glad you didn't like the plan of



the whist club. I didn't care to join and give up the Greek, but it seems to carry more weight when a fellow's father doesn't consent."

"I'm glad to have you think that way, my boy. I shall always consent to whatever is for your good. Miss Grant is a lady. And the boys ought to respect her as a teacher."

The invitation came a few days later and it was for Saturday afternoon. Helen was greeted with a warm welcome. She had only met Mrs. Henderson once before, but she was a charming well-bred woman, used to society ways in spite of the household of children. After the three large girls came one smaller, then two boys and a pretty little girl again, under school age. The big house was none too big for the merry crowd.

Even Vesta Coursen seemed to lose her shyness here. The sitting-room suggested a school itself when they were all in it. Then Miss Grant must see their rooms. All the larger children had a bookcase of their own books, some pictures, and the furnishing though simple was very pretty. There was a big play



and study room; a conservatory, in disuse now, but Mrs. Henderson had a plan for next winter.

It puzzled Helen a little that Vesta's room should be handsomer than that of the twins. There were a beautiful brass bedstead, a bureau, dressing-table, and bookcase in curly birch, some really fine paintings and pretty articles in silver, a dainty willow rocker, and two other rather expensive rattan chairs. Helen had heard the surmise that she was poor and dependent, but this didn't look quite like it.

Mark's was a boy's room pure and simple, with a narrow bed, a writing and study table, sundry boy's traps spread around, photographs, college colors, curiosities, a small cabinet of shells and minerals, and quite a fine array of books, beside portfolios of engravings.

"Some of the things came from uncle," he explained, "Vesta's father. He died abroad last year, you know. Her mother was our mother's sister, but she died when Vesta was a little thing. Mother wanted to take her before, but Mr. Coursen would not consent. She



was very seldom with him, though. She's so unlike our girls, don't you think so? I felt at first as if we should never get acquainted. Her father was quite an artist. There are some pictures of his in Paris to be sold. I believe he was rather queer," and Mark gave an embarrassed laugh. "But she's all right and sweet, and my! what a lot of some things she knows! French and Italian, and about all the painters. She has been in Rome, and was at school in Belgium. She seemed almost foreign when she first came to us."

Helen felt quite drawn to the orphaned girl, and was really glad to hear the explanation. The Hendersons were no boasters, surely.

The big parlor, on one side of the hall, was to be decorated and furnished when pleasant weather came in. At present it contained the grand piano and various boxes of bric-à-brac and pictures not unpacked.

"There has been so much to do," Mrs. Henderson explained. "And we are very comfortable. I fancy I shall like the town extremely. Mr. Henderson thinks the school excellent, which is a great desideratum with such



a household as ours. I like to have them all at home. Growing children need a mother's care."

"They seem a happy household," and Helen gave a bright smile.

"We want them to be healthy and happy. I am glad you take such an interest in Mark, and like big boys."

Helen was not quite sure that she did, but she had found Mark interesting. His boyish manliness was very pleasing to her and his charming little enthusiasms suggested some of the girls at college. She did not wonder at their refined way when she had seen the mother and father in the household. They were as polite to each other and the children as they were to the visitor. Not that they were stilted, or that there was any straining after effect. It seemed the charm of simple life at once refined and cordial.

With the exception of the Deans and the Millards she had found no one she could be so perfectly at home with. She had learned in early girlhood that one could give freely of one's inner hopes and beliefs and acquirements



without trenching on their neighbors. She had seen much offence given by incautious remarks when they were true, and the half-truths so often making trouble. She did, after a little, discuss both scholars and parents with Mr. Underwood, when she found he had a great deal of discretion. But she was a little wary of the wife, though Mrs. Underwood was in no sense a gossip, and caught the amusing side of everything.

Helen soon saw the influence that was shaping Richard Eastman: his mother's foolish criticisms and her ruinous indulgence. He was a great favorite with the girls. His Christmas party had been the leading event, his toboggan was at their service and occasionally the auto as well. It was hard to stem this current and keep her dignity. But her nature was a generous one, and as she looked back over her life she saw how many pleasant things had occurred just when she had been ready to take up the worst with a brave heart.

But this evening was like a new unfolding in Westfield. She was so interested in Mark. His influence might create a division in the



ruling sentiment. He stood up boldly for what he considered right, though he was not aggressive. And he made of his father the best friend that a boy could have. The cordiality between them was delightful.

The girls seemed very young for their years. She had noted that in school. Their boarding-school experience had rather depressed them, she thought, and their mother made girls of them in a charming manner that no girl of sense could resent.

Helen saw points she could wisely bring out, now that she knew the trend of their home life.

There was no need of games to pass away the evening. There were so many subjects of conversation. The younger children retired without a demur, and when Mrs. Henderson asked her niece to play she made no flimsy excuse, though the color overspread her face.

The piano was magnificent, and young as she was her training had been excellent, Helen noted at once.

"I am very fond of music," said Mrs. Henderson, "but I am afraid the twins will not



have much ability that way. Little Doris has. They have good voices though, and that is a real delight in a home. Nina has quite a taste for art and paints dainty little flowers from nature. Meta is the better scholar in solid things. Their father wants them really well educated if they do not have so many accomplishments. Miss Grant, I am so glad you are their teacher."

"You may be sure I will try to do my best," Helen answered warmly.

"It is comforting to find a conscientious teacher for your children, who is not so rigid but that she can see on all sides. Children of one family are so different, I have found. And I do hope we shall see you as often as your duties will admit. When the weather gets settled into positive springtime we are fond of driving about, and you must go with us."

"Oh, thank you. I am always glad and thankful to find a friend in the mother of my pupils."

They parted with a most cordial feeling on both sides. Mr. Henderson walked home with



her and said he did not know when he had enjoyed an evening so much.

Helen did begin to note a change presently. Dick Eastman did not seem to rule altogether. Mark was drawing some of the boys to his side. They talked of summer pleasures. Mark would have a boat. Couldn't they get up a boat club? And baseball—wouldn't they join and make up a nine?

"Mark Henderson will find he isn't going to be the great Panjandrum in this school," declared Dick. "They're making a great splurge now, but father heard that the mill was on a rather shaky foundation and there's a big payment ahead of Mr. Henderson. I suppose they couldn't afford to keep the children at boarding-school. As for the boat—I'll believe it when I see it," wagging his head and laughing sneeringly.

The children had been much interested in their boxes of bulbs, and they could have kissed the first beautiful pink hyacinth that came out. Then followed others, and one magnificent red tulip burst open one day so gayly that it almost looked as if it laughed,



Allen Millard said. February seemed so short, and March came in like a lamb. The skating was spoiled, the snow disappeared, when suddenly the traditional lion asserted itself and quite a blizzard appeared on the scene.

The girls had persevered and launched their whist club, after much discussion. They would have no prizes, they concluded.

"The boys will enjoy a little spread a great deal better," said Georgia Winters. "I want the first one to meet at my house. Mother is much interested in it. Oh, I don't wonder the Hendersons didn't want to join! They haven't any parlor furnished, and mother said the sitting-room was just a conglomeration of things. She thinks they are of no great account."

The first meeting was all that heart could wish. Every one came. They played without disputing, but the boys were rather noisy over the refreshments and stayed until after eleven.

"I think you ought to break up about ten," said Mrs. Winters. "And it seemed to me that Dick was rude. His mother ought to tone him down a little."



## CHAPTER XV

### DICK EASTMAN'S DARE

MARCH dropped into April in a truly spring-like fashion. In the outskirts farmers were plowing, buds were swelling, and birds calling to each other. There had been an unusually warm week and the children were restless, impatient, inattentive. The hyacinth had bloomed out and only a few tulips were left. Now the ferns were the more beautiful in their soft greenery.

It was Friday afternoon and the pupils had been dismissed, though a few of them had pleaded for a walk in the woods with Miss Grant. She had been out one day with the botany class, which had suddenly enlarged its borders if not its pursuit of knowledge. Then Thursday afternoon she and Miss Parker and Mr. Underwood had a very earnest talk about the general arrangement. He had his heart set on a senior class for the next year.



"There may possibly be five to go in it," Helen said in a rather despondent tone. "If they only cared! If they were ambitious! But the girls are planning pleasures, looking forward to vacation and how spring suits are to be made. The boys certainly haven't as much of an excuse as the girls for their lack of interest, though it is baseball time. Do you mean to have the standard high enough to admit to college?"

"Oh, I should like that above all things, for the rank of the school!" and Mr. Underwood's eyes were alight with desire.

"There will have to be some hard study, then."

"Well, we may not reach it this year. We have done well, I think. Why that little crease of dissatisfaction marring your usually serene brow, Miss Grant?"

"Thank you—is it usually serene? I am sometimes annoyed at the general tendency to leakiness in young people's brains."

"You may as well admit it *is* the general tendency," declared Miss Parker. "Then you must hammer and hammer until the leakiness



gets closed up, and you have overcome the antipathy to learning. Children may be interested on the surface when the thing is pleasurable, but few of them love learning for its own sake."

"That's rather discouraging," and Mr. Underwood laughed.

"But you seem to awaken it," and Helen glanced wonderingly at the severe lines in her face. "Your scholars are Miss Jaynes's admiration. I wonder if I let them drop down?"

"Oh, you see mine haven't come to the time of dress and whist clubs and fashions, and possible lovers. Not but that there is some foolishness and heart-burnings over sweethearts. After all I am content to stay in my groove and teach what I *do* know. If I knew more and could not make much impression with it, I should wish I had not taken the trouble of acquiring it. Miss Grant, you are in the romance of teaching. When you reach the plain prose you will do your duty and be satisfied with that."

Helen sighed. She would not want to teach if the fire and enthusiasm should die out.



“There are ten weeks yet and I do think some of the boys are anxious to get through next year. Walter Lang’s father has promised him college if he can graduate. Then Mark Henderson is ambitious. And Carl Benson. Oh, we must have the class next year!”

She could see that Mr. Underwood’s heart was set upon it. For her own sake she desired it.

And now she sat revolving plans in a very tired mind. What could she do that was better, stronger? Perhaps she had not taken up the right thing. Had her vanity led her astray? Next year. Did she really want to stay another year? She could find easier work.

It was not merely the ease and the pleasure of the work. Had she not been thinking too much of them? That was not quite what existence was for, not the end and aim of her life. Was it not to make some lives wiser, better, happier, in the only way through which real satisfaction could come?

A step startled her,—the janitor, she supposed. She began to gather up some papers



to take home. Dick Eastman crossed the room, fumbled about his desk, found what he wanted, made a sort of detour and came nearer. She would not notice or speak, and bent her head down again. Then she felt his breath on her cheek. It had been rather pale but this consciousness, or rather annoyance, brought a soft color to it like a ripening peach. There was the dainty print of a dimple in it when she smiled, but she was not smiling now.

Then suddenly he bent over and kissed it, and drew a long breath of satisfaction.

She sprang up. Her whole face down to her neck even was scarlet, her eyes flashed the fire of indignation.

"How dared you, Dick Eastman! How dared you!"

"I did dare!" He laughed insolently. Then he turned on his heel and ran down the stairs.

She stood quite still in her swelling resentment. That he of all others—but no other would have offered such an insult. Then, with a sudden revulsion of feeling she dropped into her chair, laid her hands on the desk and



buried her face in them, giving way to a flood of outraged tears. Was the dastardly fellow coming back? She would not stir.

"Oh, Miss Grant! What has happened!" It was Mr. Underwood's voice in real solicitude.

She gave a long sigh, then courageously raised her face with the tears still beading her lashes, and leaving drops of dew on her cheeks.

He took her hand gently. "You have been rather depressed to-day, I think. Was it from any remark I made yesterday? If so I am sincerely sorry. I think you have done excellent work here and I would not have you discouraged for worlds. I appreciate your earnest endeavors to raise the standard, to inspire the children, and you have opened new pages of knowledge to them."

She raised her hand. "Oh, do not think that! Nothing would please me more than to reach your idea. No, it was not that."

She was wiping away the tears, but her eyes had the luminous waver of a wind-blown lake. Should she tell him? Her face flamed again



with the sense of indignity. Yes, she would. He should not have a lingering suspicion that he had been unduly captious. But she half turned away.

“Oh, Miss Grant! That was insulting, despicable, insolent to the last degree. I did think for a while Dick was improving; he has surely, in scholarship. But I heard only a day or two ago that some of the boys were playing cards in the back room of a saloon, and drinking beer, if nothing stronger.”

“I know he does. And Larry Dinsmore. I have noticed it in their breath. I have wondered if it were better to speak of it. And one day Dick's voice was thick and his eyes showed it.”

“Yes, it is right, and I am glad to know this on such good authority. I had resolved to speak to his father. Mr. Eastman is a clean, upright sort of man, and when he is roused can assert himself. And I know in this other matter he will not only apologize to you, but compel Dick to make very humble amends. He is away now, but is expected home by to-morrow evening. What a shame that young lads



should fall in the way of temptation, or run into it designedly! Dick has so much in his hands that it is worse for him in the outset. I know he has not had a good influence on some of the larger boys, though he has a strong enough personality to make his mark. His mother has been weakly indulgent, and I am afraid she rules his father somewhat," with a half smile, "but she would be broken-hearted if he went astray. There is a gang of boys who are employed during the day,—that is no discredit to them,—but they want to have what they call a jolly time in the evening. Our boys have fallen in with them, I am sorry to say. I have been considering how I could break it up. Mr. Dinsmore drops into a saloon now and then, and the Dinsmores and the Burkes are friends. I think Mr. Burke would object to schoolboys haunting his place."

Helen began to recover her composure though her cheeks wore a vivid flush.

Mr. Underwood took her hand in an almost fatherly clasp.

"My dear Miss Grant, I want you to feel always that I am your sincere friend, that I



admire your courage and perseverance, and your attainments. I believe we are both striving for the same end, and both feel the same regret when things do not come up to our expectations. You really have been invaluable to me, and I thank you for every effort. You can trust me to settle this matter so that you will have no more insolence from that quarter. If Dick cannot behave like a gentleman he must go elsewhere, that is all."

"Thank you very sincerely," she returned in a tone of emotion.

"And now dismiss this troublesome matter and take a real holiday to-morrow. I do believe everything will come out as we hope, and a large part of the credit will be yours. Not that I undervalue Miss Jaynes."

"Miss Jaynes has been a very great help to me," Helen responded.

Then she arranged her few papers and he bade her a friendly adieu. She did not go directly home, but took a little walk to calm her throbbing nerves. And a delightful call in the evening from Mr. Hildreth quite restored her equanimity.



But she did not seem to have much of a holiday. There were letters to write. How they did manage to pile up! Some winter garments to put away, summer ones to shake out of their folds and make presentable. Lilian was going down town, as they called it, and to the library. She had found some companionable girls and was developing a really admirable interest in others.

"I mean to take a nice long trolley ride, to the little woods at least. There may be some spring flowers," Helen announced. "Will you take my letters down and mail them?"

"With pleasure. Oh, what a pile!"

"You look tired; don't ramble about too much," advised Mrs. Stirling.

Helen considered. She would take the trolley out Rossmore way as far as the little woods, as they were called. One came along soon and she signaled. There were not many passengers about this time, as the trend on Saturday was coming in and returning in the evening. The air was soft enough to have a window open. There were many signs of active life. Newly plowed fields, mending



fences, cows at pasture cropping the short grass, gardens being put in order, dried weeds and dead branches making a blaze here and there, hens marching with their heads up in the air and filling it with their strident songs, interspersed with the robust crow of a Chanticleer perched on the fence. It somehow took her back to Hope and childhood. She saw the little girl in her best white frock, almost outgrown, standing up that last day of school, "speaking her piece," Browning's "Hervé Riel." And she smiled over the old line. "Sirs, believe me there's a way." There was a way out of every trouble if one had the patience to search for it.

She stopped the car. There was a plain-looking, middle-aged woman sitting by the door. She touched Helen's dress.

"My dear," she said, "I've been watching you a little. You must have a happy heart when it writes such pleasant lines in your face. And it's like a bit of sunshine. If girls only knew how much good they do with a cheerful smile they would never look cross and tired of everything. It's a pleasant world as God



makes it, but we put so many needless troubles in it."

Helen nodded and stepped off, but her heart had grown suddenly light. And the line always brought Gordon Danforth to her mind. She would like so to hear about him! Of course he was very busy studying on his two undertakings.

The woods had not leaved out very much though the dogwood was showing greenish white. The moss in some of the untrodden places was like a velvet carpet. The thrushes were already beginning their antiphonal chant, and occasionally a robin tried to drown it with his merry lilt. Here was a patch of violets in tenderest blue, a little further on she found some white ones, and the first hepatica blossoms she had seen. Several other things she picked to classify. A few ferns were slowly unrolling.

The path was full of curves. No one seemed to have walked in a straight line. Here some trees had been cut down. Somehow she felt sorry they could not have stood until fall. There were beautiful lichens, but she could not



carry everything. She would bring some of the girls up here; in a week or so it would be still lovelier.

Then she turned to retrace her steps and wandered on, enjoying every sight and sound. Once she broke into a gay college song. Yes, she would try to be light-hearted, if the unconscious influence could touch a stranger. Why should she not put off the evil day until Monday? In her secret heart she hoped Dick Eastman might be sent away—that “way” would be most satisfactory.

Why, where was she? She stopped suddenly. Here was a group of oak trees she had not seen before, and a growth of underbrush that was new to her. Which path should she take, for the ways divided? The sun had gone under a cloud and a shadowy sort of gloom had settled about. She was not afraid; so far she had met no one.

This trodden path seemed the best. She walked on a little faster, seeing a light that must surely be the end of it. But she came out into a wagon-road, little used, and looked about. Some distance beyond a wagon was



moving along, so there must be a road. She had turned wrongly and come out on the other side. After looking about a moment she decided on a short cut across the intervening space, though there was no regular path.

But it was a very fine road, she found, and she thought she had been driven over it. How to get out to the trolley was the question. Some distance ahead was what seemed the back of a vehicle of some sort. In the quiet she heard the welcome sound of the trolley. Then she had only to keep on to where this crossed the other road.

As she came nearer she found that an auto had been stranded and left by its owner, doubtless. It was on the opposite side of the road and she passed it with a cursory glance. Then, as she looked back, she saw something huddled in a heap. Should she investigate? It was getting late and she ought to hurry on. But what could she do? The priest and the Levite passed by, she remembered.

Yes, it really was some one; a man's figure. She turned the head a little and then stood, shocked. For it was Dick Eastman's face,



cold as marble, with the eyes closed, the hands clenched. She drew a quivering, frightened breath. There was no pulse. And such a little while ago she had wished him to go out of her life.

She wiped the dust from the face. Everyone admitted that Dick Eastman was good-looking. She had seen so much of that supercilious smirk in his face, and the contemptuous curl of the lip, that for her there was nothing to admire. Now it was really beautiful, like carven marble. The broad forehead and swelling breadth of temple, the straight nose, the long lashes on the white cheek that many a girl had envied, the curve of the lips with the sneer gone out of them, just a trifle apart, looking almost like a smile, touched her deeply.

"Oh, Dick! poor Dick!" she cried, and the tears came into her own eyes.

What could she do? There was a house some distance farther on. She ran swiftly, reaching it panting and breathless.

A rather forbidding countrywoman came to the door, with her sleeves rolled above her elbows.



"Are there any men about?" she asked. "Some one has been hurt in an auto accident. I don't know whether he is killed or not."

"Well, if the auto is his'n it serves him jest about right. I've allers said them as runs the pesky concerns are the ones that oughter suffer'n not innercent folks. Were you in it?"

"No, I was passing along and saw him. He lives at Westfield. If a man could go with a wagon," and her voice shook with anxiety.

"Well, they can't from here, 'cause there ain't a man around. They went down in town with a load of produce and won't be home afore nine or ten. They always stay for a carouse, though they're stiddy enough the rest of the week. I d'n know what you'll do. I can't abide them besoms of destruction, killin' your critters and roustin' up such a dust.. It's nothin' but clean an' clean. I wish every one on 'em would bust up! Might try at the Cummins', over there in that yaller house."

Then she shut the door and went back to her work.

Helen inquired at the yellow house. All the



men folks were gone away. It was quite a fashion to go down in town on Saturday. The three women plied her with questions. Was she sure he was dead? Was she any relation? Yes, they'd heard of Eastman's mill. They saw the auto go tearing by three good hours ago, they guessed it was that one. They'd go down and see, but the best thing would be to take the trolley and give the alarm.

That was all she could do. She turned and walked rapidly out to the main road and waited, it seemed an interminable time, before the car came. Then she considered. She had better see Mr. Underwood. And he would be at his dinner, so she would go at once to Mrs. Trafton's. It was getting dark now.

"Mr. Underwood's at his dinner. Would you come in and wait?" said the maid.

"Please tell him that Miss Grant wishes to see him on important business," she said in a tired voice.

He came to the door at once.

"Oh, what is it, Miss Grant?" he cried in an alarmed tone. "You look like a ghost. What has happened?"



She leaned against the doorpost for support, and told the story as briefly as she could, and the efforts she had made.

"I have been afraid of this. Dick is a reckless fellow. Yes, I must find some one and go at once. That's the old Davis road—avenue, they call it now. Oh, do come in and have a cup of tea or coffee. You look as if you would faint. I'll send some one home with you," in deep solicitude.

"I never do faint. No, I want to get home. You will look after it all?" in a tremulous tone.

"Yes. Mr. Eastman won't be home until nine to-night. Oh, you had better stop and rest."

"No, no," with a decisive gesture.

Then she turned away. The walk to Mrs. Stirling's was up a slight ascent. It seemed to Helen she had never been so tired in her life, though a good deal of it was the nervous shock and anxiety, and the awful thought of Dick Eastman lying there at the roadside, dead.

Mrs. Stirling was as kind as a mother. Lilian took her hat and wrap, and she made



Helen lie down on the sofa, bringing her a cup of tea presently and saying:

"Wait, dear, until you get a bit rested and then you shall tell us all the particulars. You're just exhausted. It was awful to be there all alone."

"How good you are!" She pressed Mrs. Stirling's hand, and drew some long breaths. And then a bit of delicious toast was brought to her and she began to feel quite refreshed, and told the main incidents.

"You went across the woods," said Mrs. Stirling.

"I began to feel that I had gone astray and was a little confused."

"They cut that bit of road through the Davis property. He gave them the ground. Before that it was a crooked little lane, a sort of short cut. Then the county took it in hand and now it is a handsome street running over to Glendale. And that Mr. Eastman should be away! She will go wild. She's no hand to bear anything."

Helen pitied her profoundly. And if Dick were really dead! She shuddered over that!



She felt after a little that she would be more comfortable upstairs in bed, but it seemed as if she was waiting for some tidings. She wished she had asked Mr. Underwood to let her know, even if it were the worst. Nine o'clock came, then half-past, and just as she had resolved to retire the bell rang. Yes, that was Mr. Underwood's voice.

"I knew you would feel anxious," and he clasped her hand. "It is not quite the worst, but no one can tell at present. He is not dead, but is still unconscious. I took Dr. Barber and Mr. Benson and his big wagon. Some women were there watching. Then he called in Dr. Stearns, and they will stay all night. Mrs. Eastman just goes from one faint to another. I had to go and break the news to Mr. Eastman, and then I came up here. It has made a great excitement. Oh, Miss Grant, whatever way it ends they ought to be very thankful to you! He might have lain there all night, for the road is not traveled much, and in the dark no one would have noticed. His left arm is broken, but the doctor thinks there has been a blow to the head. They can do nothing



until to-morrow. And *I* thank you sincerely."

"It was by mere accident. I was lost in the woods. I meant to go out by the same path at which I entered. But I think—some one would have found him."

"I am afraid it would have been too late. And now I will say good-night, for you look thoroughly exhausted. I'll be in to-morrow to bring you whatever news there is."

Helen had not yet recovered from her amazement that it should have happened this way. She wished it had not been Dick Eastman. She did not feel that she could endure any effusive gratitude on the part of his family. Did anything happen by mere chance? Oh, no, it was all ordered by Providence. She thought of some events in her past life. Richard Eastman would hate to owe anything to her, she well knew.

In spite of it all she slept soundly and awoke so refreshed the next morning that at first it seemed as if nothing unusual had happened. Her fine physique asserted itself. Mrs. Stirling advised her not to go to church, but she did.



The prayer for a person in trouble was read most fervently, and she joined in it with very earnest feeling. This was not the Eastmans' church, either.

But they had the sympathy of the best part of the town. It was a great shock. Helen turned away from the little groups discussing it as they came out of church. Lilian lingered, much interested in the talk.

"He is just the same," she said, rejoining them. "But they are afraid Mrs. Eastman will really lose her mind. It is dreadful."

Mr. and Mrs. Underwood came up in the afternoon. She had been in the midst of the excitement, and was full of it.

"Mr. Eastman *did* object to Dick going out alone in the auto. He didn't start alone, though. Larry Dinsmore, Carl Benson and Walter Lang were with him at first and they had some sort of dispute, it seems. Walter Lang got out and advised him to go home. So the three boys left him, and perhaps saved themselves from an accident. When his mother was with him he could not be so reckless."



"He is still unconscious," remarked Mr. Underwood. "The arm has been set; that was a clean break. They have found only a small bruise on his head. The heart action is very weak, they had hard work to get any at all. Mr. Eastman is crushed by the affair. Dick wasn't such a bad fellow, only he has been getting too wild. Still, one's only child is a great deal to one. It will be an awful blow to him if the worst happens."

He was over by the window with Helen presently, when she said in a low tone:

"Will you please forget the incident of Friday? The Eastmans will have sorrow enough without aught else being added."

"As you wish. Though if he lives there should be a most humble apology made. And he will owe his life largely to you. They thought twice last night that he was gone past recall."



## CHAPTER XVI

### WHEAT OUTGROWING THE TARES

A CURIOUS awe and a sense of order pervaded the school on Monday. Recitations and exercises were better than usual. If they could always be as willing to do their best, Helen thought, teaching would be a delight.

Consciousness of death near by is always a solemn terror to the young. And Dick had been a great favorite with the boys in spite of his masterful ways. He spent his money freely, he never did a mean thing where that was concerned. If he overran his allowance he could always coax money out of his mother. He aimed at leadership and scrupled at nothing to win it. He could laugh a boy out of a good resolve and he had set himself in opposition to Miss Grant for no special reason, only "no woman was going to boss him." His mother had been incensed at her decided stand in the early matter of the rating, and her strictures



had strengthened his boyishly unjust resolves. He had penetration enough to see that Mr. Underwood would stand by her, and really he had no personal dislike to her, only in the sense of position. He would have done the same with any other teacher. If she had unbent a little she might have cajoled him,—for such natures are more easily won by flattery than they admit. His mother loved and flattered and coaxed. The girls flattered and coaxed as well. If they could gain his consent to anything, they were sure of the rest of the boys. The school at present was not large enough for two distinct parties, and Dick didn't mean there should be two. But simple as it was, he felt he would like to kick Allen Millard when Miss Grant smiled upon him or praised him. He did not hang after the big boys and kept out of their way. They all knew it would be an unmanly thing to torment him without the shadow of a cause.

The week ended again in a sort of triumph for Helen. The girls did some small things, but they, too, were moved by the general sorrow. Neither of the doctors would venture



to predict how it would go with the young fellow hovering between life and death.

And about this time another matter occurred that changed the trend of the girlish gossip and surmises. The Hendersons had put their spacious parlor in order and furnished it handsomely. Then the *Gazette* had copied from a New York art magazine the fact that the estate of Virgilius Coursen in Paris, quite a promising artist who had died about a year ago, consisting of pictures and bric-à-brac, had been recently sold. Two of his paintings had brought four thousand dollars apiece, and the others from that down to three hundred. The proceeds would reach at least twenty thousand dollars, after all expenses were paid, and the whole amount was to go to his only daughter, Miss Vesta Coursen. Her uncle, Mr. Henderson, had been appointed her guardian.

"Would you ever have suspected it?" cried Kate Ford. "That insignificant sort of a girl! How close-mouthed they were about any fortune!"

"Well, really fine pictures do not always bring big prices. And some go up to the forty



or fifty thousand, so they could not have been wonderful."

"But several of them had been exhibited in the Paris Salon. The paper said he was something of a recluse, so I guess he was rather queer."

"And you thought she was a poor relation, Georgia."

"I'm sure she seemed enough like it. She acts as if she didn't dare say her soul was her own."

"Well," said Jennie White, "I'd like to have twenty thousand dollars all *my* own. And I believe they are going to give a party to the young people. And, oh, girls! they're going to have a splendid tennis court! That big lot next to theirs. I like the girls. I mean to get in with them."

"I wouldn't toady to any one!" and Georgia tossed her head disdainfully. "Where did you hear all this wonderful news, Jennie?"

"I'm not going to toady. I've liked them right along. Harry was over last evening and they were laying out the tennis court on paper. And Mark is going to have a fine rowboat.



He thinks the boys ought to have a boat club."

"O dear! We'll be top of the heap!" cried Katherine Ford disdainfully.

"Mark Henderson's stock may go up with a rush, but you just wait until Dick gets about again!"

It was true that Mark was coming into favor with the boys. The tennis court and the boat were a kind of offset to the auto.

"But you see," said Larry Dinsmore in a conclave with a few of the boys, "that wouldn't have happened if Dick had been quite sober. Carl and I know he wasn't, and he was very touchy. I wouldn't have risked my life with him in that condition. Though they say the auto isn't much damaged. Maybe he fell, or jumped out."

"I think we have all been like a flock of sheep following the wether," began Carl Benson. "I've been giving it a little thought. We've just let him lead us, though several times I have kicked. I didn't like calling in those mill fellows, and boys,—when you play for money and bet on a game it is gambling.



Not that I think work disgraceful, and those young fellows graduated from this grammar school. But I'm not going down to Callahan's any more. I don't know what father would say to me!"

"Mark Henderson and his father are just like two chums, and do have grand, good times," declared Harry.

Then they all said, "Poor Dick," yet they had a secret feeling that they had given in too easily to his rule. They had not stood up against things they knew were not right. They had not upheld the real honor of the school and they knew how hard Mr. Underwood was working for it. To their credit, they felt a little ashamed.

Larry stood at Miss Grant's desk one afternoon, after school was dismissed, for his Latin exercise.

"I want to compliment you on your improvement, Larry," she said, glancing up with her pretty, winsome smile. "And your trigonometry was fine work. You know Mr. Underwood is very anxious to fill up a senior class for next year. I think there are five of you



boys who, if they studied with a right good will and resolve, could go in it. There are two months left."

How pretty and eager she was! He flushed with a sort of boyish embarrassment.

"You know," she continued in a soft, persuasive tone, "that this is your town, your school. You will be the men in it, the rulers of it presently. I think you might feel proud of a fine high school. Larry, suppose you were always able to say, 'I was among the first graduates of our high school.' The girls in the college were very proud of its standing. It is the pupils that make it worthy, that do not lower its tone in the county or state, and most of us did uphold it bravely, earnestly. I may go away, you know, but you may always live here. You will be the alumni. Ten years from now you will be telling what it was to you, if you make a success of it. You see it is largely in the hands of you boys and girls."

Larry stood there fingering the edge of his coat. And he noted then, with an uneasy flush, that his hands were not very clean; hers were so white, with the carefully kept finger nails.



And her voice had such an alluring sound that it enlisted ambition and influence and made him feel as if he could try.

"It would be splendid to be in the first graduating class," he replied with a long, quivering breath.

"Larry," she went on, "I skipped the sophomore year in college and went in the juniors. I was only an ordinary girl, but I studied hard, and tried to do my best. Will you not do this for Mr. Underwood's sake, and incite some of the boys to follow?"

"I'll do it for your sake," he returned in a voice almost rough with boyish emotion.

"Thank you. That will be the first-fruits of my very earnest endeavor, and pleasant for me to remember in the years to come. You boys have a good deal of influence over each other, more than you really believe. And if now and then you could use it for the best and highest purpose, and be a true leader in the march of life——"

He felt that her eyes were on him. He recalled so many mean and hateful little things he had done,—that they all had done, in-



fluenced by Dick Eastman. His face grew redder and redder, and he winked hard to keep something out of his eyes—not tears, of course. He wasn't the sort of sissy boy to be moved that way, but he said in a rather breathless voice:

“I'm going to try my best.”

She gave his hand a little pressure and he blushed still deeper, thinking how far from clean it was.

The next day Miss Grant made two announcements. It was Mr. Underwood's ardent desire that there should be a senior class next year. She could count up fourteen girls and boys who would be eligible, she thought, if they bent all their energies to study the next two months. Mr. Underwood would be glad to give all the assistance in his power, and she would do likewise. She hoped the scholars would gratify him by their best efforts. He had made out a list for the examination papers, which any pupil could see.

The other was a note from Mr. Henderson.

He had arranged his tennis court, and the young people in the high school would be



heartily welcome to it on Wednesday and Saturday afternoons, on the condition that none should trespass on his garden or lawn, or destroy any flowers or fruit. He hoped they would join with his children in having very happy times.

Walter Lang's hand went up.

Miss Grant nodded assent.

"Can't we give three cheers at recess for Mr. Henderson?"

"I think so. I'll explain it to Mr. Underwood. And I'd like one of you to write a note of acknowledgment, and all who would like to play, sign it."

The cheering was splendid, the boys thought.

"I ought to have planned this," Mr. Hil-dreth said to Helen. "This comes of not having any young people of one's own," and he sighed.

"But you have done so much already," she made answer.

Larry Dinsmore had a talk with the boys that did rouse some of their best impulses, and there was no one to sneer them down.



So they came into beautiful, blossoming, fragrant May, when the air was throbbing with sunshine and song of birds. One day a weak, faint consciousness returned to Dick Eastman.

"Mother," he whispered with a great effort.

The nurse bent over him. "Your mother is ill in bed. Oh! the doctor will be relieved that you have spoken!" and she telephoned at once.

"What happened? What makes me so sore and stiff?"

"An auto accident."

"Yesterday, wasn't it? And to-day is Sunday."

"You shall hear all about it when you are stronger."

He tried to turn. Something in his back hurt him. Yes, he was in the auto, and——

Then he dropped off to sleep, and was breathing naturally when the doctors came in.

"Well, the poor lad has a fighting chance now," they said.



The news spread about. But Dick was only barely alive. Mrs. Eastman had been wildly hysterical and worked herself into a fever, being now truly ill. As for Mr. Eastman, it had been a sad time indeed. He had sat many an hour by his unconscious son, who seemed already dead. He had objected to his going alone with the auto, though Dick had quite a genius for mechanics and had learned to make many repairs in case of need. He had the warmest sympathy of his neighbors, but he had to bear his keenest sorrows alone. And when he looked at the long years to come without Dick, life seemed drear indeed.

If the boys had been like a flock of sheep following a leader, the girls were not much better. When the Henderson girls asked all the big girls, forgetting sundry snubs, for they wanted a good time, and the big boys, if they were not so well acquainted with them, to a lawn party—Mark managed about the boys,—no one declined. Mrs. Henderson seemed to be in her element. She was very fond of young people and really wanted to know her daughters' associates. They had a great time



in the tennis court, they saw all the lovely adornments of the parlor; the girls' rooms had received sundry additions, and in the parlor were hung two of the paintings by Vesta's father which were to be hers: a beautiful Venetian night scene, and some Spanish children dancing. There were two colored fiddlers and they had quadrilles on the tennis ground, which had been rolled hard as a floor. Oh! how gay and merry they were! Then there was tea on the wide porch that ran all across the front, four tables, and the two maids to wait on them. Miss Grant and Mr. and Mrs. Underwood were the only grown guests, and the latter made herself most agreeable to the girls and she had quite a budget of fun.

The moon coming up at about eight crowned the scene. The young people wandered around with nothing to mar their delight except now and then some one said, "Oh, if poor Dick could be here!"

Mr. Underwood and the host had quite a spirited talk about school matters, and the future of boys particularly. They both agreed on many points.



Mr. Underwood felt that here was a man who would care, and would uphold him in the moral as well as intellectual improvement.

Mr. Henderson made them a little speech. The river up above was fine for rowing and that was one of the things that had been his specialty in college life. He hoped there would be a boat club, and a debating club, as well as baseball. He wanted to see Westfield High School the pride of the county.

Mr. Underwood added a little in a rather humorous fashion, that did rouse the boys' enthusiasm.

"Some of you boys ought to move a vote of thanks to Mr. and Mrs. Henderson for the lovely entertainment," said Helen to a group of boys. "Larry?"

"Oh, I couldn't! Please don't ask me," and the boy's face was scarlet.

"We want the debating society to make you off-hand speakers against the time you are men. Isn't there one boy brave enough?"

They all hung back and looked at each other in dismay.

"Oh, boys!" she exclaimed upbraidingly.



Archie Varick stepped out. "I'll do it if you think I can."

"Yes. It is only a simple thing after all."

Archie's business training of a year in an office had given him a sort of courage. So he stepped out in a manly fashion and acquitted himself very creditably, ending with a proposal of three cheers that were given heartily.

Mrs. Henderson gave all the girl guests a most cordial invitation to visit her young people and be friends with them.

"She is really very well-bred," said Georgia Winters, "and will be an acquisition to Westfield."

Something surely had inspired the larger girls and boys. Helen spoke of the decided change.

"It is all the preliminary work," declared Mr. Underwood. "You can't have your crop without plowing and harrowing and seeding. That doesn't make much show, but your crop springs up presently if the seed is good for anything."

"And there are no adverse influences," she added, with a half smile of mischief.



“Poor Dick! Yet I can’t help thinking it may be his salvation as well as ours. He was getting in with a bad lot and dragging some of the boys with him. I like Mark. He has a kind of soldierly way with him that I admire. Oh, you will reap the results of your labor next year. You have good courage, Miss Grant.”

Next year! Would she come back? Two months ago she had been really disheartened. She knew there were easier places to be had. Her ready decision had settled a good many rough points for her, but she was not quite satisfied to make it now.

The school was like a little world again. The big outside world changed its mind, cast off theories and beliefs that were vigorous while they lasted, but were superseded by newer ones, whether they were truer or not. And after the lawn party she noted a great change. The Henderson girls were sought after, their opinions asked, walks and pleasures planned with them. It was fortunate that they had been brought up in honest, upright ways, and made strong enough to rely upon an



opinion they considered right. They had been trained to look at the best in people, not to magnify little faults and failings. They were full of fun and ready for any pleasure. Vesta Coursen was so shy and reserved they could not make much headway with her, but a girl who had a fortune in her own right, and whose father was an artist who had been honored abroad, was not to be passed by.

As for Mark, he had slipped into a sort of leadership without aspiring to it and filled Dick's vacant place. The tennis court and the boat quite distanced the auto, now that its master lay helpless in bed. They could all join in the tennis, and rowing received a new impetus since there were boats to hire.

Poor Dick! How many times they said it. The boys did so with sincerest sympathy, though they admitted to each other, in very confidential moments, that he had led them into scrapes they were ashamed of now, and they wondered somewhat at their ready participation.

"I don't go to a saloon any more, nor drink beer," said Carl Benson. "Old Woody gave



us a great talking to about it—Dinsmore and Lang and me,—for it was quite noised about that Dick was 'way off that day, and he surely was. I used to chew cloves—I didn't want Miss Grant to notice it. Boys, do you believe he really kissed her that day, or was it pure brag? I am ashamed that we dared him to do it."

Almost a month later Mr. Underwood told the larger boys that Dick was allowed to see company and had wished for them. His arm was about well, but there had been an injury to the spine, and how bad it was the doctor could not quite tell.

"It's best that he should have some diversion, they think, and he has begged to see some of you boys, so I said you would come."

"I'll be mighty glad to!" exclaimed Carl.  
"Poor old Dick!"

"You and Larry then, and a day or two after White and Walter Lang."

The next morning Larry was at school early and went up to Miss Grant's desk.

"Well," she asked in a tone of soft inquiry, "did you see your friend?"



“ Oh, Miss Grant ! ” and Larry tried to clear a bit of emotion out of his throat. “ Your heart would ache for him, I know. He was so robust and daring, and full of spirit and plans, and now he lies there white as a bit of marble, with great imploring dark eyes as if asking for help. And his hands are so thin now he couldn’t even hold a ball. His voice is so weak and tremulous,” and Larry winked very hard. He wouldn’t for worlds, in his boy’s pride, tell Miss Grant that they all cried together. “ And we told him about school and the plan for a senior class, and how we were studying.” Larry hurried lest there should be a break in his voice. “ He was so interested. Oh, Miss Grant, it’s been just awful for him to lie there alone day after day and not move about, when he was always so active. The nurse reads to him, and his father had a book rest made for him, so he can have papers and magazines about. But that’s not like real life, and the boys and school and play. And he was so interested in the boat club! He’s a real good oarsman. Its just dreadful!”

“ It is, indeed,” in her sympathizing tone.



"You boys must do all you can to cheer him."

The girls talked of "poor Dick" as well, but he seemed to have dropped out of the vital part of friendship. Of course they did not visit him. The mothers went occasionally. Mrs. Eastman came home quite restored, but she could talk of nothing except their great misfortune and her agonizing and inconsolable grief.

The boys gave up pleasures for him, and now there were many delights for the splendid afternoons. Were boys more chivalrous than girls? She had known a good deal about girls, their crudeness, their self-aggrandizement, their vanity, and littleness on many points. Boys of this age were a new study to her. Were they developing kindlier and more sympathetic traits from this sad mishap to one of their number? Larry had never been insolent and supercilious like Dick, but his roughness seemed curiously toned down. He was gentler now, and took more interest in the younger boys.



## CHAPTER XVII

### A SUCCESS AND A CONFESSION

"OH, Miss Grant!" Georgia Winters exclaimed one afternoon, when several of the girls had lingered to see the outcome of her plan that she had announced to them with great enthusiasm, indeed had arranged it in a most fascinating manner. "Don't you think we can have a commencement? The high school at Newton is going to have a splendid one. A friend was over yesterday telling me all about it, and last evening after she went I began a poem. It was a sort of inspiration to me," and the girl's eyes shone with eagerness and a desire to distinguish herself.

Helen was rather startled for a moment.

"Mr. Underwood will have to decide that. Or rather—I think we haven't the right material. You see we should have some graduates, and there will be only promotions. We have no honor pupils, no diplomas to dis-



tribute. No, it would not be a real commencement," and she smiled with a sort of winsome sympathy for their disappointment.

"But we might have some little celebration," said Miss Ford.

"There will be the closing exercises of the school."

"That won't be anything special to us," returned Georgia in a rather short tone.

"Some of you might take part in the singing."

"If it's the grammar school's entertainment let them provide their own music," and Georgia gave a toss of her head.

"Oh, Miss Grant, don't you think you could persuade him?" pleaded Althea Barber. "Why, we might almost as well not have had any high school. Who will know about it?"

"But if we have so little to show for the year's work," she said in a tone that was not altogether discouraging. "Oh, girls, I do wish some of you, all of you, would try for promotion in the seniors. Generally it is the girls who outstrip the boys, though this time they have had the longer training."



The girls looked deeply disappointed. Helen felt really sorry for them.

"I will see what Mr. Underwood says," she added in a kindly tone.

Mr. Underwood negatived the plan at once.

"Why, we really would have nothing to show," and he laughed. "Mr. Hildreth is to make an address, and you may be sure the experiment will not suffer at his hands. But I wish there was one bright boy who would take it up enthusiastically from the pupils' side. Would Lang or Benson do it?"

She thought a moment. "Harry White would do excellently. He is a ready speaker and has some very good points. Then he is fond of study and really proud of his advancement. He has a fine voice and nice manners."

"I'll see him and talk about it. I hope devoutly that we shall have some graduates next year."

Helen smiled rather absently. Would she really be here? Why should she be so irresolute?

The girls received the non-compliance rather sullenly.



“I do not believe she really tried,” declared Katherine Ford. “She’s been so wrapped up in the boys lately that she’s hardly had a bit of attention for us. Next year, indeed! I’m not sure I shall come back. I don’t see what good half the stuff we learn is going to do one,” with a gesture of disdain.

“No, she doesn’t take the interest in us that she ought,” returned Georgia. “She hasn’t a real poetical nature though she makes such a fuss over the old English poets. She can talk to Allen Millard about Chaucer and Spenser when she ought to be doing other things. And she brought me Dr. Donne and Gower, and some other stupid old fellows that had written short poems, a great book full that she thought were excellent studies. Why, if I could not write sweeter and better poems I wouldn’t try at all!”

“I do think old English literature a bore. Beside we are Americans and we have poets of our own. I like some of Longfellow’s, and that ‘Bedouin Song’ of Bayard Taylor, and Eugene Field. Why, we have ever so many poets of our own!”



"Those old things came in the study of the beginnings," said Honor Bain. "I was a good deal interested in it, though I think the spelling something awful."

"They didn't really know how to spell in those days," with an air of superiority.

"I mean to be a modern poet," interposed Georgia loftily. "Mother has some books I like better. Mrs. Hemans's poems are lovely, though she was English. But there's Alice and Phoebe Carey, and they had a salon on Sunday afternoon. I'd like to do that, only I'd have mine in the evening and ask in different poets, and we would read from our own works. I mean to write enough for a volume and have them published. Miss Grant thinks those of her friend are so sweet and dainty, but they seem to me the sort of things 'most any body could sit down and dash off in a few moments. They haven't any real deep thought."

"But we're not all poets by nature," said Caroline Bradley. "I couldn't write a poem to save my neck."

"Yes, it is genius," agreed Georgia. "It comes to you like a beautiful dream, as if you



had been wandering in some enchanted country and you must write. Sometimes I get up after I have been in bed a little while, because such a splendid thought came into my mind. You lose them quickly if you don't seize them at the moment. I wish we had an enthusiastic teacher with a poetical temperament."

"But what would we do in the knotty points of trigonometry? And there's logic and rhetoric."

"I don't expect to teach school," said Georgia loftily, "so I don't bother my brain about those things."

"But you have to if you want to pass."

"I really don't care whether I graduate or not. I could go to boarding-school where I could have elective studies, but mother and I have nice times together, and while the rest of you are here it is rather stupid to stay at home."

"You are a lucky girl, Georgia Winters."

Georgia gave a sigh of content, bridling her head. She was glad of the half vanity that made this admiration seem only her just deserts.



How rapidly the days passed! Helen did not have time for half the things she had planned to do. The walks had to be abridged, though she did try to get a short ramble in the morning. Now and then she met Mr. Hildreth and had a nice talk. There had been several visits, once to dinner with just Mrs. Stirling, when she had a fine opportunity to inspect the library. Twice when there had been several guests, with Mrs. Underwood as the entertainer. But these walks were a great delight to her. The talks always began with the school and branched off into books they both liked and why they liked them.

As for other invitations, cordial as they were she felt they must be declined at least until after vacation. Examinations began. Miss Parker had worked steadily and well, and there would be quite an influx in the high school.

"We shall have our senior class," Helen announced triumphantly, "unless you exercise a severe censorship. Seven boys, and not a girl! And I am puzzled about the juniors. There are eight girls who ought to enter, but



truly they are not well prepared. Here is the list."

Mr. Underwood glanced it over and drew his brow into a little frown.

"There are three mothers here that we shall make bitter enemies if we do not advance their daughters. Why not give them two years in the junior? In another year or two we can show our independence and keep to the true standard. What do you propose to do with your poet?"

Helen laughed and flushed. "She is not *my* discovery and I despair of cultivating the true poetic art. A great many girls write verses in their school days, 'green and salad days' some one calls them, then they marry, and the care of this weary world extinguishes the divine afflatus. I wish it might be so with Miss Winters."

"That's capital. She is fairly pretty; bright, when she is not unduly sentimental. I'm sorry the *Gazette* took her up. Still I suppose the town can endure one half-fledged genius."

"She is so sure of her poetic gift that I have not felt equal to combating it, though I have



set her at some rather hard reading. There are poetic natures. Allen Millard has one, and several of the smaller girls have almost divine appreciation. But this is a flow of beautiful words and a facility of rhyming, with a great paucity of ideas. We do get tired of starry skies and stars dancing in their orbit, and bluest heaven and all that."

"Well, we will hope for better things next year. It has been hard, uphill work, but I think the worst is over, Miss Grant."

He had been watching the doubt in her face. Now their eyes met. She flushed, tried to speak, but there was merely a quiver of the lip.

"Oh, surely, surely, you will come back! The appointment has been settled upon. We cannot let you go."

"I have not decided," in a wavering tone.

He sprang up and began to pace back and forth in a sort of surprised agitation.

"Miss Grant, the work, your work is only half done. I wonder that you have accomplished so much. I was a little doubtful when you first came, but I have no doubt now. Let me tell you what Dinsmore's father said a few



nights ago. 'That school-teacher of yours is A1. I didn't know my boy could be improved so much. Why, he's grown studious and polite and has developed a thoughtfulness that is unusual in a growing boy. And he has given up cigarettes. He's neater and cleaner and quite refined.' "

"But a good deal of that is due to Dick's accident. They have been very kind and friendly with him, and I think even he looks at things differently. Isn't there any improvement? "

Mr. Underwood shook his head slowly. "They are afraid it will have to come to an operation. It's mighty hard for the poor lad. There is a difference in the boys, I can see that myself. I have tried to persuade several of them to give up the pernicious habit of smoking while they are so young. I gave up smoking in the street for the sake of the example, but Mrs. Underwood always inveighed against it as ungentlemanly. But to come back to our subject. You have nothing else in view? "

She answered with a negative motion of the head. Somehow she could not trust her voice.



"Then stay, stay. I want you. I should not know how to get on without you. We have come to be real friends, I think; at least it is a most enjoyable and satisfactory friendship to me. I trust to your judgment as I would to a much older person. Why, I should feel like throwing up the thing. Mr. Hildreth will never consent. Oh, promise me you will not think of going! You must stay and enjoy the fruit of your labors. And next year we will have a real commencement."

"I have hardly had time to consider it. The days have been so full."

"Then do not think. I shall set Mr. Hildreth at persuading you. Oh, he will not let you go! His very heart is set upon the success of the school. And really we cannot afford to have it anything else. We must not make ourselves the butt of the county."

"I should want no other persuasion save yours, and the proffer of your friendship. Thank you for your good opinion and all your kindness."

"You deserve it, and more. Did you have a bad ten minutes with the girls on account of



the refusal? Mrs. Winters went at me on the same subject, but I convinced her we had no grounds to go upon. It will take all our energies for the closing exercises."

Harry White consented to do his best, and under Mr. Underwood's supervision composed a really creditable address, but he insisted that he should learn it by heart and deliver it as a speech.

The girls forgot their tiff and took quite an interest in the exercises. The ground floor had been arranged for an auditorium or lecture room when necessary, and was quite commodious. The children had trimmed it with branches of greenery and bloom, and long before the hour the audience began to assemble. Mr. Underwood was really proud of the numbers. The platform was draped with flags and some tall jars of flowers and ferns were disposed around.

There was a fine chorus from the children. An interesting address from Mr. Hildreth on the prosperity that had attended the venture, and on the general improvement of the town.

There followed the usual speaking and sing-



ing, and Harry White's speech was received with rapturous applause, as in an earnest, manly way he recapitulated the efforts that had been made for the boys' welfare and their own resolves to make the best of the opportunities before them, promising that friends and parents would find a great improvement another year.

He was followed by Mr. Underwood, who made a brief, felicitous address and delivered the diplomas, tied with white ribbons for the girls and red for the boys, quite a number of whom would enter the high school. After that came the parting song, and then the personal congratulations. It seemed to Helen as if she would never get through.

"I just think I might have had a chance with my poem," Georgia Winters said to her mother. "It would have been quite as good as that speech of Harry White's."

"Your turn will come presently," consoled Mrs. Winters; though she felt rather annoyed.

Some one took her arm gently and Helen turned to face Mr. Eastman.

"Dick would make me come, and the whole thing has been splendid. Mr. Hildreth must



be a proud man to-night," he began in a tone of hearty admiration. "But you look very tired. Miss Grant, I want to ask a great favor. You know perhaps that Dick is to go to a hospital," and the father's voice had a tremble in it. "These doctors cannot do anything more for him and this is our last hope. He wants to see you very much. Oh, will you not come to-morrow afternoon? My poor boy—to think he has missed all this. Here is a note he sent, but he wanted you to promise me——" and his voice broke.

"I promise you," she replied without a moment's hesitation.

"Oh, thank you! He was so afraid——"

"Tell him I, too, wish he had been here. Yes, I will come," she replied, much moved.

The throngs went hither and thither. It had really been a gala night. Helen's head was in a whirl with congratulations and invitations. She was glad to get home and went straight to her room.

Richard Eastman's note was brief and written with a very shaky hand.



“DEAR MISS GRANT: I do not deserve that you should take pity on me, but I am going away, as perhaps father will tell you, and I want to see you very, very much. DICK.”

“Poor fellow!” she sighed. And if she had not fully and freely forgiven him before she did then.

She slept late the next morning, but she did not sleep away all the fatigue. There had been a very severe strain all the week. And when she came downstairs, Lilian had set out all the gifts of the children. Booklets, scrap-bags, and even some pretty doilies they had worked themselves; vases, and a chain of beads.

“Why, it looks like Christmas!” she exclaimed gayly. “I didn’t think so many cared.”

“Oh, Miss Grant, they were all praising you so heartily! And I don’t wonder,” Lilian ended.

There were letters to write and a host of things to do, but she went out on the cool porch and lay in the hammock. She kept thinking of Dick; she dreaded and yet she wished to see



him. The doctors had admitted that it was a very grave matter.

A step came up the walk and a tall figure shadowed her. But before she could stir Mr. Hildreth held up his hand commandingly.

"I am glad to see you taking it easy after all the stress, but not storm," smiling. "Everything went off in a most admirable fashion. I know there never was so much attention paid to closing exercises before. How finely that lad, Harry White, acquitted himself! He has the making of an orator in him. Next year we will have a high school commencement. I heard some of the girls were deeply disappointed."

"But they understood how it was. I think the boys have improved wonderfully. They ought to be very grateful to you."

"They or their fathers?" with a humorous intonation, seating himself in a veranda chair.

"Some of the fathers are, I know," Helen returned.

"I have been very remiss about another matter, and have come to make amends before you see it in this evening's paper. At the



school meeting on Tuesday evening you were unanimously appointed for the ensuing year. It's a mere matter of form."

"But suppose I had decided not to return?" with fascinating archness.

"Then, Miss Grant, we should proceed to extremities. You would be taken a prisoner and kept in close confinement until the first Monday in September. Mr. Underwood and myself would be the jailers."

"That sounds dreadful to an innocent person."

"You had not thought—why, we couldn't spare you!" and there was resolve in his face.

"That is very flattering," and her eyes sparkled with mirth.

"If we took a vote of the pupils, there would be hardly a dissenting voice."

She thought she knew of two or three.

"It would be a greater trial to Mr. Underwood than you imagine. He said you had worked together so harmoniously and that he had found some of your newer methods admirable. You had not seriously thought——"



There was almost consternation visible in his face.

"I have been so engrossed I had hardly thought at all. I will admit the work does interest me deeply. I like to go on with whatever I undertake. So I shall accept without any demur."

"Thank you most cordially. I suppose you have planned your vacation?"

"No. I have not really planned anything. I shall go to Grey Court to my friend. Then I have visits and visits piled up. I don't know how I shall get through."

His face fell into grave lines. She wondered if somewhere along life he had not experienced a great sorrow.

"Yes, first of all you must have a rest."

"And next week I am invited out to luncheons and dinners, three or four a day. I shall feel as they did in old times when the school teacher boarded round," and she laughed gayly.

"I shall speak for one. Miss Grant, you have no idea how I shall miss you. And the school interest. Last year it was the building.



And now I shall have nothing to do. Though I suppose a man ought never to say that, with all the work there is in the world. But some work has a more vital interest than other work."

She could not imagine his not having a vital interest in everything, a man with his wide sympathies. Would he miss her? Would he really be glad to have her back again? She recalled her girlish admiration for Mr. Wilmarth and the home that had seemed the embodiment of delightful satisfaction. If there were only a charming Mrs. Hildreth—and she could go in and out as a daughter of the house.

"What were you thinking of?" he asked in her reverie of silence.

She flushed warmly. "Of some people I knew at Hope when I was only a girl," she answered.

If she had raised her eyes she would have been amazed at the sudden gravity of his face, something akin to a hurt.

Then he rose. "The Underwoods will come for a sort of good-by visit. Suppose I invite



the Hendersons. I think I forget how young you are and it ought to be young people instead."

"No. Oh, I do believe I have outgrown the young people, they seem crude to me!" and she raised a smiling face.

"No, you must not do that," he protested earnestly. "But I think you are the sort of person who will keep youth, true vital youth, a long while. I can't imagine your growing old."

"'But the years they come and the years they go,' " she quoted.

He said good-morning and turned away. Oh! she would be very sorry to have him go out of her life. She experienced a sudden and unreasonable gladness that she had decided to come back for another year.

Did she fall asleep in that delicious morning air, in the glow of youth and vague presences that no brain could analyze, that seemed to be waiting in the future? For she was surprised when Lilian called her in to lunch. And she had meant to think about Dick Eastman. But she knew by experience that there was no



use in planning what one should do or say. Yet she shrank a little from the interview. One cannot see helplessness without a heart-ache.

Mr. Eastman opened the door for her and took her hand in the kind of clasp that gives a warm assurance of pleasure.

"Take off your hat," he said, "and I'll convey you up to Dick, who has been waiting. You need not be afraid of agitating him, though you'll find him weak and babyish. It was so good of you to come."

How strangely still the house seemed. It was, of course, handsomely furnished. The parlor doors were wide apart—she had heard about the splendid Christmas party when everything was so beautiful.

Up the softly carpeted stairs they went. Dick had been moved to one of the guest rooms, that was elegantly appointed without being overloaded, and much more convenient and spacious than his. There was a center table with papers and magazines, a small bookcase, and some fine pictures to entertain the weary eye.



"Miss Grant has come, Dick," the father said in a cheery voice, and then he left her on the threshold.

Helen went straight to the side of the bed and put out her hand. She had seen him in that deadly unconsciousness, but he was thinner now, and his eyes seemed so large and dark, set in the pallid face.

He took it, and she stood there a moment profoundly stirred by the great change.

"Will you sit down, please? Bring the chair up near. I want to talk and there is so much to say. You have heard, I suppose, that the next step for me is the hospital?"

"Yes. And I hope——"

"Everybody gives me good wishes. No one can tell. Oh, when you have lain here weeks—it seems a year to me, and there is no improvement! Well, for father's sake I'd go through everything, though somehow I haven't much hope. But that wasn't what I want to talk about. When a fellow has lain here day after day, all alive mentally, but helpless to move about, and watched the stars through sleepless nights, he thinks of many



things, all of the past. And when he may never come back to make amends——”

The tears overflowed and wandered down the thin cheeks. He brushed them quietly away.

“You see what a baby I have grown.”

“Oh, Dick, don’t mind any of the past! You know I couldn’t hold it against you. Let it all go,” she interrupted.

“No, I can’t let it go without a word. I’m not going to ask you to forgive me for some of the worst, but I do want to tell you how sorry and ashamed I am. You saved my life by finding me just as you did, and taking so much trouble. Mr. Underwood told me. They thought me dead and almost gave up, but father wouldn’t let them. Then there were two weeks when I lay like a log—only a log couldn’t breathe and I did. And then I came back to life, but something had gone wrong with my back. They put me in the plaster cast and that hasn’t done any good. There’s some pain—I could stand that, but to lie here helpless—and I am so young. And when I came to face the fact, oh, Miss Grant, I don’t want





HELEN WENT STRAIGHT TO THE SIDE OF THE BED AND PUT OUT  
HER HAND. — *Page 405.*







to die! Life is such a splendid thing and the world is so beautiful.”

“Oh, Dick, don’t think of that! Surgeons do such wonderful things now.”

“Oh, I’ve caught a word or two. But the choice is between lying here for years and suffering, or that. For father’s sake I’m going to take that. And I want you to believe that from the outset I had nothing against you as Miss Grant, but it was the boyish contrariness, the love of not giving in, of showing that I wasn’t going to be ruled or advised by a woman. And yet I did just the same thing to a young man over at Ridgewood. I’ve had my own way in ’most everything through love, and it hasn’t been a good thing—as father and I see now. Miss Grant, he’s the most splendid father——”

Dick covered his face a moment with his handkerchief. The ready tears flashed to Helen’s eyes. She reached over and took his hand.

“I was in that Hallowe’en mischief. It was my plan, and only one boy helped. We did it for a scare. I never thought of the log falling against any one, but when such a fuss was



made about it we were pretty well scared ourselves and tried to throw the escapade on some of the mill boys. I don't know how I could have been so mean and cruel to a woman, only in the grammar school I used to torment Miss Parker. But she wasn't young and pretty and sweet, and she had Mr. Underwood right back of her. I just took a delight in butting up against everything and making believe I didn't know things when I did, just to make the others laugh. And you remember about the excuse I didn't bring and the wretched exercise? Mr. Underwood said then that if I went on this way, being such a bad influence, I should be expelled. He told father, and father said if that occurred he would send me to a strict military school. I was having good fun at home and being indulged in everything and wanted to stay here. So I was more careful. Only—only—yes, you must hear it all, I did get in with some fellows, not in the club but outside, and we played cards, betting and drinking beer. I wish I could blot all that out. I look at that boy and think he ought to have been horsewhipped."



“Oh, Dick, you are tired! Let all the rest go. I forgave it—when I looked at you that day and was afraid you might be dead. Do you think I could have held any sense of offense against you?”

There was a silence of several minutes, and she could hear the breath that came so irregularly.

“I had been drinking something stronger than beer that last afternoon. Oh! I wish I could get out on my knees to you and tell you how shameful I thought that wicked thing was! I’d made a bet with the boys—why, it seems to me now that any tough of them all would hardly have done such a dastardly act. If I should never come back here except in a coffin, you may forgive me out of pure charity then, but you can go on holding it against me——”

“Oh, Dick, no! no! I told you I forgave it long ago. I have had nothing but sincerest sympathy for you through all this dreadful time.”

“I could better forgive myself if I had kissed you on the impulse of the moment. You looked so pretty that day, and there was al-



most a dimple in your cheek; there is when you smile, but to do it that way! Oh! I do despise myself. I've been so mean and I have hated mean things in other boys, except when I set them afloat. It always seemed small and cowardly to me to repent when you couldn't help yourself, but I had to do this. I've gone over it so many times by myself until I've said, 'It serves you just right, Dick Eastman, that this thing should happen to you. No one punished you for all the bad until God took it in hand.' You know that ministers say these things are a judgment. Now I have mine."

"I don't know that I quite believe that. I think God lets us go on in our own way when we are so resolved to have it, until we do something that brings about the punishment. There are times when it seems as if He interfered out of divine pity and saved us from the worst. But we have no warrant for trusting to that. And we have our own willfulness to blame."

"I do believe that is so. I had the boys with me and they found fault with the way I was spinning along. We had a scrap and they would get out. Larry said he couldn't trust



me. That made me mad. Something went a little wrong but I was bound to make the old thing go. That's all I remember. Then I punished myself."

"God allowed you to have your own way."

It was strange, he thought, that he should remember the events of that afternoon so clearly. He wanted the boys to stop and have a glass of beer. Larry said, "You're too full now, Dick Eastman," and that had angered him. Then Benson insisted upon getting out and he had told them both to go. After that he was reckless. It seemed only a few moments, but he had gone a mile or more when he turned into the lower road, where it had all ended.

A faint color had crept up into his wan cheeks. Yes, he did have himself to blame, it was no real accident. It was will against a bit of machinery, and the inanimate could not transgress its bounds.

"And you have done so well without me," with a long sigh in his voice. "Oh, it was so good when they let me see the boys. I'd had a kind of jealous dislike to Henderson and was



bound that he shouldn't be the boss. But he is a better fellow and a better leader, and I am glad for your sake. I might have done all this for you and won your respect, instead of having been a bad influence and tried to set up the others and laugh them out of the best, out of their duty. Oh, I knew all the time I was in the wrong, the more shame to me! And while I've been lying here in pain and humiliation, the boys have been winning Mr. Underwood's approbation and getting promoted to the first senior class of our high school. It just stings me through and through! They brought in their books and read over the lessons and translations, and worked out some examples for me to see. They were so good. I shall never forget it."

"They have been splendid. They have distanced the girls."

"Some of the girls are not much in the way of students," he said rather disdainfully. "But I am glad for your sake and Mr. Underwood's. He thinks he couldn't have done so much but for you. After all, he is a fine teacher. Oh, I do wonder why we can't ap-



preciate all that is done for us until long afterward. What fools we are!"

"Are you not very tired?" she said softly.

"Oh, I was very quiet all the morning. The nurse had a holiday. Miss Grant, how did you come to find me? Just along there the road is rather lonely."

"Why, it was quite odd. I went further in the woods than I meant, lured by some wild flowers. Then I turned the wrong way, meaning to get out, tried two different paths, found a wagon road where they had been hauling logs, and so came out. I passed the auto, then looking back, I saw something lying there."

"I suppose there would have been an alarm. I told the boys I was going to Glendale, but I changed my mind. In fact, it was full of changes that afternoon. O, dear! If I could go back."

Ah! what a frequent cry, always in vain!

"We can never do that," in her comforting voice that seemed to take the sting out of the hard truth. "But the privilege given us sometime is of showing others how to avoid dangers."



"When they are not pig-headed and bound to go against common sense."

"I think after a while the burden of these old sins and mistakes is buried after the promise of the divine love, and that is what the Savior meant when He said, 'Let the dead bury their dead.' We must begin a new life when we see the better way. Oh, Dick, there have been writers and statesmen who have been disabled in some respects and yet done worthy work. Somehow I feel you are going through this without too great a cost."

Dared she give him hope?

"Well," after a long pause, swallowing over the great throbs in his throat, "if it should be the worst, won't you comfort father a little and let him talk to you about me? He loves me so! I'm not half as good as he thinks, though I have told him about everything. And he will be so lonely. There should have been some better children to be his stay and comfort and pride. And he thinks, the doctor as well, that if I had lain there an hour or two longer it would have been all over with me; so that I really owe my life to you. If I should



ever be permitted to make anything worthy of it, I think it will be largely owing to you," and his tremulous voice died away.

"Oh, Dick, you look clear exhausted and I must go! Every day I shall think of you, pray for you. And you must have no more upbraiding thoughts about those old matters. I know it will be a hard thing to live out of, but God will give you strength if you ask Him earnestly."

Helen rose then and stood looking at him with tenderest sympathy. Suddenly she leaned over and pressed a kiss on the blue-veined forehead. His arms were up around her, his tears were on her cheek.

"Helen—may I call you that just once?—it is such a noble name! I wish God had given me just such a sister."

She went slowly out of the room. She could not trust her voice to say good-by. Mr. Eastman came out in the hall.

"When are you going?" she asked tremulously.

"The first of the week. He was not willing to leave until after the closing exercises.



And he wanted a good long talk with you. Is it all right?" hesitatingly.

"It was never very wrong," she answered. "I think he would have seen it himself presently. Oh, I hope——"

"I hardly dare. I shall stay down until the fateful question is settled. I am so much obliged to you for coming."

Then he pressed her hand warmly.



## CHAPTER XVIII

### THE CROWNING OF THE YEAR

HELEN thought it strange afterward that Dick had never mentioned his mother. Neither had Mr. Eastman spoken of her. She was at home, at least she was not away on any visit. In a way, Helen would have felt sorry for her if she had seen her lying on the couch in her own room, crying by spells and wondering what Dick had wanted of Miss Grant when he had always disliked her so. She would make him worse with all her talk, and he needed every bit of strength. And that horrid operation to come—would they find something displaced and a hump grow out of it? Some one had mentioned such a contingency. Her straight, strong, fine-looking son! She knew he would rather be dead than disfigured, and how could she endure it!

Much as she loved him and thought she loved her husband, everything revolved about



herself. She was sure she had suffered in every pain and ache of his, and she always cried over him in her visits until sometimes the nurse actually forced her from the room. She had insisted on having her discharged, but Dick liked her ministrations and the doctor settled the matter peremptorily. No one understood a mother's feelings, she averred.

And now she wanted to question Dick as to what Miss Grant had said all this while, but Mr. Eastman interposed.

"I am going to read him to sleep." He had quite learned to assert himself through this time. "He feels a little drowsy. No, the talk has not hurt him in the least."

Luckily she was summoned to the parlor by a call.

Helen wended her way home in a thoughtful mood. She had listened to Dick's confession, and she was glad to find so much latent manliness in him. What a curious experience her year had been! Different from any ideal she had formed. Had she done what was best and wisest? Oh! was not life full of mistakes, of dropped stitches that one had to go back and



gather up? She had not influenced the girls and boys as she had hoped. Yet how could she tell? Influence was far-reaching, like the plants whose roots may run a long way in the ground and then reappear.

There was another prayer said for Richard Eastman on Sunday. Tuesday morning the ambulance was to come for him.

Monday Helen went to tea at the Goulds'. Their garden was a perfect sight of bloom and beauty, their strawberries still luscious, and the choicest of raspberries, while the biscuit and pot cheese were perfection.

The course of lectures had somehow fallen through the past winter, but they were only in abeyance. Mr. Hildreth had made arrangements for them to begin quite early the ensuing season.

"We're so glad there's to be no change with you, Miss Grant," said Miss Mary. "And you are to have a talk about girls' college life. Why, I told Mr. Hildreth when he first spoke to me that folks would call me a crazy old loon to get up and speak in public. But after he had gone over the ground and told how much



people were interested in the old things, not only old furniture and candlesticks and and-irons, but the way people lived and were educated and all that, and sent me some magazines where two different old people had written out reminiscences—isn't that what they call it—why, I thought I could tell quite as interesting things myself. So I really did consent, if I'm alive and well."

"And I for one shall be among the delighted part of the audience," Helen said in a joyous, enthusiastic voice.

"Everybody is counting so on next year—not that exactly, but your return and the opening of school. I said to Mr. Underwood, 'You don't know. She may have a lover stowed away somewhere, and be married about holiday times.'"

"No, I haven't any lover," and she laughed gayly. "And I've promised for the whole year."

"And what do you suppose he replied? That they were going to find you a lover here and settle you at Westfield for life."

She blushed then, though she could not have



told why. But she had the longing of youth to be well liked and was glad in her heart.

Then there were the Deans, where the children hung about her and bewailed the fact of her departure.

"For we have had such nice walks and talks," said Lois. "And you make things so delightful in school that I am just longing to get up to your class."

"But Miss Jaynes is very interesting."

"Yes," rather lingeringly. "And I do mean to teach school if I ever can learn enough. I think it is the most splendid thing."

Helen smiled encouragingly. She could recall her girl's dream of teaching, then because she loved study, later for the great influence she was to wield. Would she ever attain to all her dreams, or settle to Miss Parker's level, being merely an excellent, unenthusiastic teacher?

But she did very much enjoy the tea-drinking at the Millards'. The artist daughter was home on a vacation and had brought a freshness, and the talk of the great city, of pictures



and books, of the remarkable works in the museum, of exhibitions here and there.

"I don't aim at being anything wonderful, you must know," she said with a light-hearted air, "but I like it and the people it brings you in contact with, and the fresh knowledge on every side. There are hundreds of the small folk to the one distinguished genius, but they all seem to find a place and work. I comfort myself in the thought that a great many little things are needed all along in life, and so make myself content. And now Allan aims at being a great professor somewhere. Miss Grant, you have inspired him. The children can talk of nothing but school."

So her work had not been without some results.

"Allan is a fine scholar and one of my best boys," Helen said warmly.

They talked a little of Dick Eastman; he was in every one's mind just now.

"Mrs. Eastman took it very hard," said Mrs. Millard. "She did not want to go with them, but the doctor would never have consented if she had, she is so very nervous. But



she is quite sure she shall never see him alive again. Doctor Barber said he had made the greatest improvement Sunday and Monday of any time yet. But it is terrible."

"Oh, Miss Grant! I wish I could see more of you," Miss Millard exclaimed. "I don't wonder Allan talks about you. You are certainly very charming."

It was so honestly said that Helen could not consider it mere compliment.

Her most trying visit was at the Winters'. She had declined the tea drinking once, but the importunity was so great that she reconsidered. She had been twice with the Underwoods through the winter, on one occasion to a musicale, as Georgia was quite a pianist and had a very sweet voice. She waited until the last moment, and when she reached the house it was almost supper time.

"I didn't know but that you meant to give us the go by after all, and not keep your promise, which would set a rather bad example to our young people, now wouldn't it?" with a soft, affected laugh. Mrs. Winters was a rather pretentious person, and though in comfortable



circumstances called it poverty, and gave the impression that her present life was too circumscribed to do herself any sort of justice, and that in youth she had been used to a much higher degree of elegance. The meal was simply a tea, but the little maid waited on the table. Mr. Winters was a commonplace man much immersed in business, and excused himself as soon as the meal was over.

The ladies retired to the parlor and Helen asked Georgia for a song, and she gave three.

"Now, Georgia," began the mother, "let us talk a little business. My dear Miss Grant, you have been about so much and seen so many people I thought you might give us a little advice in literary matters. Then your friend had a volume of poems published. How does anyone get them before the public? Georgia has almost enough for a volume. She could finish it this summer."

Helen sat in a little consternation, almost speechless.

"You see, Georgia will never have any demands made upon her like the girls who have to teach or go in offices. She can use all her



time for her own improvement, and when one has a genius one ought to make the best of it—don't you think so? But one is quite out of the world in a place like this and doesn't really know the best steps to take. Do advise us."

Helen gave a conventional laugh to cover a sort of embarrassment.

"I really do not know much about it myself. My friend had very intellectual parents and was reared in a sort of poetic atmosphere. At college the higher authorities considered her a poet, and she did some really beautiful things. But I knew nothing about the volume until it was presented to me at Christmas time. Her husband, who adores her, found a way, I believe."

"But I thought colleges turned out writers and poets and authors."

"They begin at the lowest round of the ladder. Several of our girls went at newspaper work, some in publishing houses, and as they saw opportunities disposed of stories and poems."

"I couldn't write stories," said Georgia. "Everything appeals to me in the way of



poetry. And I know mine are as pretty as most of those I read."

"Georgia is very choice about her language. She will sometimes wait hours for just the word she wants," said her mother approvingly.

Could one have the courage to extinguish the aspirations of budding genius that would never flower? Mr. Underwood had not done it. Mr. Conover accepted her verses for the *Gazette*. Helen felt it would not be wise for her to do it.

"I think," as if she had been considering the point, "that I should write to some of the publishers and learn from headquarters what opportunities there are. At all events you could do nothing for the fall trade, publishers make their arrangements so long beforehand. Oh, now I think of a plan! Consult Mrs. Vail, the librarian. She was in a bookselling place for two years, a sort of exchange, and must have learned a good deal about the business side. For it isn't all poetry," with a soft, consoling laugh.

"I did talk a little to her one time, but it seems to me she only knows about the dead



poets,—Tennyson, Longfellow, and Whittier. I don't care for Whittier myself. She hasn't the true poetic instinct, either."

"Why not consult Mr. Conover?"

"Well, he thinks poetry doesn't pay, and proposed Georgia getting out a volume just for private distribution. But I know Mr. Winters wouldn't be willing to spend money that way, and it really would not give her any outside fame. One must be before the public if one wants success. But how to get there?"

"I am sorry I cannot tell you just how to do it," returned Helen, with all the sympathy she could put in her voice.

"And we thought you would surely know," said Mrs. Winters in a disappointed tone. "I did suppose college women knew a little of 'most everything."

"They might after a number of post-graduate courses. I have had only one and that was quite severely practical. But Georgia might spend part of her vacation going over her poems and polishing them up, and writing some new ones."

"I can't polish," Georgia exclaimed in a



rather short tone. "I think a line over and over and get it to suit me, and then it is right and I never could better it. I depend upon my first inspiration."

Helen was beating about in her brain for something to say, when Providence, it seemed to her, sent in a rather gossipy neighbor who soon had the floor to herself. Then she rose and said she must go, and for once she felt glad of the society nothings that she often despised, but now they made the parting agreeable.

Lilian had walked down the street to meet her.

"Oh, Lilian!" she cried, with a pæan of relief in her voice. "I'm so glad you do not write verses. And that we have only one poet in the school."

"Why, I sometimes have made a verse that sounded real pretty, but I never could find the next one to go with it," and she laughed in amusement.

Helen laughed away her perplexity also.

There were a few more calls, and her packing to be done. She was to go to the city



on Saturday. They would surely have some word about Dick in the morning. She was really getting very tired and wanted a rest.

Mr. Underwood came up in the morning. They were to start at ten. He had a brief note in his hand from Mr. Eastman.

The operation had taken place on Thursday and they found the damage to the spinal vertebræ had been worse than they suspected. Dick had come out of it bravely, but was so very weak the doctor hardly left him a moment, and was not willing to predict the result at present.

The quick, sympathetic tears came to Helen's eyes. "Mrs. Underwood and I have been having one big thanksgiving that we shall not lose you. Have a good time in vacation and come back bright and rested. Dick is in God's hands and we can't change anything. Strange, but I believe we have all come to love the lad."

The expressman had come for her trunk and Lilian went about with a very sober face.

Mr. Hildreth called presently.

"I've telegraphed to Mr. Bell that you will



start at three and he will meet you," he announced.

"Why—I was to leave at one-thirty."

"I want you for a little drive. I have something to say before you go."

His face was grave, and she wondered.

"I will come about two," he said.

The three sat over their dinner and tried to say cheerful things. They would miss her very much. But the last good-by had to come. Mr. Hildreth drove up to the door.

The sky had begun to cloud over with white drifts and the wind was blowing up cooler. There were some shady roads and he turned into one. They spoke of Dick and wished the tidings had been better. Then there was quite a silence between them.

"Helen,"—she noticed how beautifully he pronounced the name, and he had always said Miss Grant before,—“I suppose you are wondering what I had to say so specially. It will surprise you, perhaps, but I could not let you go without saying it. I love you!”

"Oh!" she cried in amazement, in regret, and put up her hand as if to shield herself.



He had the reins in his right hand and with the other he clasped hers in a sort of gentle strength.

“My child,” he began, “I wish I were your father. I wish I had the right to have you in my home as a daughter. If the world were different, if there were no evil minds and tongues to lick up scandal from the very dews of heaven, I should say to you, ‘Come and be my daughter. I have enough for both. I want you there, your sweet, gracious presence, your graceful and yet innately vigorous movements, your bright glance that seems to see inspiration in all it looks upon, your sweet, courageous voice that imparts strength. Come and let me be a true father to you.’”

“Oh, Mr. Hildreth!” she cried, and it seemed almost as if there were tears in her voice. “Why did you not marry years ago and have sons and daughters to enjoy this generous fatherhood?”

“I will tell you presently why mine is a lonely home. If I could do this, heaven only knows how glad I would be, how blest beyond comparison, how full of ineffable content. But



you know I could not. Evil tongues would mar what would be almost divine satisfaction. Do you remember the day you and your friend came—the luncheon, the walk around the garden? I recall you best there, for you seemed to throw off a slight touch of restraint and were simply a sweet young girl. I sat and dreamed of you that night. I saw you flitting about in dainty household ways, sitting at the table pouring my coffee, smiling up at me, talking of things that would interest us both. Then you were in the library in some delicate white gown, reading to me from the poets we both love, glancing up now and then at a thought appealing to both souls, talking over certain lines, and I sitting in blest content. The clock would strike ten and we were loath to go; eleven, and you would close the book, we would rise and go out in the hall with my arm about you, and then a dear good-night kiss, and such a rich content as it is given but few to know. Am I a foolish old fellow?"

She let her hand remain in his clasp. It was the fatherhood she had dreamed of, that she



had come to enjoy in certain gentle ways with Willard's father.

“But you see this cannot be. And yet I want you. My life grows lonelier without you. This is why I ask you to be my wife, as that is the only way you can come to me in perfect honor before the world. I do not quite approve of so much difference in ages. It is hardest on the woman. She is entitled to the beautiful and golden future of love and youth, of the ardor and the enthralling interest in the glow of love's bright dreams; the radiant hopes that make glad every step of the way. She is plunged into the land of middle life where the shades of afternoon come too early. For middle life has had its day and alas! cannot go back to youth. And when she has reached a fine and rich middle life he is an old man, perhaps has grown querulous and intolerant. Still I think I could add many delights to your life. Nay, you are not to answer me now. It is no subject to be decided in one thrill of feeling. You are to take it away with you, to think it over, to consider it well, for there may come to you one of those great and



wonderful preferences in which a woman finds the lord and master of her soul and yields blissfully, contentedly, and reaches the highest fruition."

"Oh!" she exclaimed. "I have no words to thank you for this honor."

It was not the voice of irresistible, adorable love, but a mighty wavering between pity and admiration.

"There is another episode you must know, that will answer your question why I have neither son nor daughter. Only you must not let your heavenly sympathy sway you too strongly. You will find as you go along life that some of the worthiest souls are impelled to make a confidante of you. You have a certain discretion, a trustworthiness that impresses one. I think you would be true to the death over the secret of another person. This you have now the finest right to know, and only two other people in all the world have heard it, except some physicians.

"When I was a young man of one and twenty, and had graduated, I went abroad



and had a year's study at the University at Bonn. I met an American family and traveled about with them a little, and they had a most beautiful ward. I have seldom seen a girl so ideally perfect as to face and figure and motion. And her eyes were glorious; that sort of purple blue, appealing, deprecating, disarming one's criticism. I was a great admirer of beauty in those days, and felt that when I married I must have something beautiful to look at in all the years to come. I fell deeply, honestly in love. I think I never saw her exactly alone. Mrs. Bennet guarded her closely, but it was the fashion of the times and I did not consider her too punctilious. She was the child of a dead friend and Mrs. Bennet seemed very fond of her. They were going down to Rome, and the marriage was hurried for a good reason, as I came to know afterward.

“She was very sweet and yielding, like a well-trained child, but extremely immature. They gave her age as nineteen but I think she was not more than sixteen. After the first glow of enthrallment was over I began to re-



mark some strange things about her. She seemed to forget so easily. She was a delightful reader, but before a book was half read she had lost the first of it out of her mind. When I said, 'We were at such a place yesterday,' she would sometimes look up wonderingly and say, 'Were we?' And I made the awful discovery that she had no intellectual mind, that she was just like a good sweet little child. I consulted a physician, who pronounced it a sort of imbecility. You may guess how shocked I was."

"Oh! How could you endure it?" Helen cried, moved beyond control.

"I found the Bennets after some search and learned that he was a gambler. Mrs. Bennet insisted that she had never noticed anything strange about her. Perhaps I had frightened her by some masterly ways. I could get no satisfaction whatever. I was advised to put her in a home for the training of weak intellect as a hope. I did so and came home for a year. Of course I said nothing about my marriage. When I went back she had forgotten me."



Helen was moved to tears, and glanced up pityingly.

“There really was no hope for her, and nothing remained but to place her in some institution for imbeciles. But I took her on a journey to see what a change would do. She was a sweet, pure, irresponsible child. Of course I could not keep her with me as she had to have a nurse and attendant. So a friend helped me to find a home. I had married her of my own free will, and she had no other protector. I could not throw her on the charity of the world. I traveled, I studied, I found many things to enjoy. I went back and forth. Father had died, then one uncle; the other was old and in poor health, so I made Westfield my home and began to take an interest in its affairs. The world was moving on some larger, broader lines, and I realized my life had been given back to me for some wise purpose, not a mere dilettante existence. I could not move the greater world but I saw I could be of service in my own town, so I accepted the work. I was not quite twenty-three when I was married. I was thirty-eight when the poor thing



died, after four years of utter imbecility and partial blindness. You see it was not a story to tell or have gossiped about."

"Oh! How heroic you have been!" How true and tender the eyes were that she raised bravely to him, swimming in tears.

"My child, you must not think I have been very unhappy. I have made delightful friends, I have had many pleasures; one of the greatest has been this year, and you. I have succeeded in my endeavor, and you have, and will give the school, a character. You will come back, and whatever your verdict may be I shall accept it, but do not take away your friendship—if it must be only that. And now my hour is up, and your train is nearly due."

He turned the horses.

"Oh! I do not know what to say," and her voice was tremulous with emotion.

"You are to say nothing. Somewhere through the summer we shall meet again. But I wanted you to know all this."

Then he stopped the horses and handed her out. Not much too soon, for the train came along with its shrill whistle. He went in with



her, seated her, and bending over, gave her a tender kiss and was gone.

She had a soft little cry by herself. There were very few in the train. She would come back for another year's work and then—and then?

Could any one tell what the year would bring? What the year did bring may be read in the next and concluding volume of the "Helen Grant Books," which will be entitled, "Helen Grant's Choice."

THE END

*Helen*











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